

Recent Developments

The modern history of the Canadian theatre began a few years before the birth of the Canada Council with the arrival of television, the establishment of the Stratford Shakespearean Festival, the emergence of Le Théâtre du Nouveau Monde and Le Rideau Vert in Montreal and the Crest Theatre and the itinerant Canadian Players in Toronto. The early 1950s saw the first round in a struggle to develop a wholly professional theatre where an actor could begin to earn a living from the exercise of his talents. Television is part of the story, because it initially provided more and better-paid employment than radio had been able to offer to many who could not support themselves from intermittent work in the live theatre.

A full account of the developments since then should include reference to such significant events as the evolution of the French-Canadian theatre, the progress of the Stratford Festival and the other important summer festivals, the rise of the National Ballet, the establishment of the National Theatre School and the National Ballet School and the emergence of the English-speaking "separate" stage. It should also be concerned with the development of a nation-wide chain of professional theatre organizations, the emphasis on the provision of productions and performances for young people and the search of the Dominion Drama Festival to find new ways to contribute to a changing situation.

Resurgence in French Canada

Since the Second World War, the most widely acknowledged advances in French-Canadian cultural life have taken place in the theatre. Before the War, the Province of Quebec had no theatrical company of professional standing and no repertory available for continuous performance. Starting almost from scratch, the movement has gained so much momentum that Montreal today boasts several professional companies presenting regular seasons. Montreal is now the most important French-speaking theatre centre outside Paris and Brussels and, after New York, the most important theatre city in North America.

The rebirth dates to the establishment, in 1938, of Les Compagnons de Saint-Laurent, who, for almost 15 years, set the pace for theatrical revival in French Canada. A rival group, L'Equipe, composed of radio actors with a realism in their productions borrowed from the American stage, was formed in 1944 and held its own for five seasons. In 1948, several actors from L'Equipe formed a group to be known later as Le Rideau Vert. Le Rideau Vert now has the most varied and ambitious of Montreal's theatrical repertoires.

When they disbanded in 1952, Les Compagnons de Saint-Laurent left a significant heritage, the French classics had been revived, foreign plays had been performed and the way had been paved for the acceptance of modern and even contemporary plays. In 1951, two former members of Les Compagnons established a new group -- Le Théâtre du Nouveau Monde. This new group was well received in Montreal and has since become a truly international company. French theatre has been the mainstay of Le Théâtre du Nouveau Monde but it has also given notable productions of foreign plays. In 1954, plays by Canadian authors were presented for the first time.