

## Hosanna

HOSANNA is not just a study of transvestites (although it is certainly that) but of social pretenses. It has the mark of a great playwright, one difficult to describe but easy to perceive. Michel Tremblay's power is not simply in his style, his choice of *joual*, his fascination with the bizarre or his daring. His daring is mainly cerebral; in an age when sexual activities are frequently graphically described on TV talk shows, his actors usually keep most of their clothes on and use relatively few obscenities. He has impact because his plays pulse with life's flow. *Hosanna* is the story of a disastrous night in the life of a young man named Claude who calls himself Hosanna and who lives with a man named Cuirette, a motorcycle greaser gone to seed. Hosanna has been tricked by his friends, other transvestites, into dressing up for a costume ball as Cleopatra. He believes that each of his peers will be costumed as a different great lady of history, but in a planned humiliation, they all dress up as Cleopatra. After the ball Hosanna recalls his foolish preparations:

"... just a little bit like something that might

vaguely resemble, from a distance, Elizabeth Taylor in Cleopatra. . . . Then the wig, which, by the way, took me two weeks to talk a client into loaning me [he is a hairdresser], I put on the wig. . . . and I looked exactly the way I look right now . . . minus what got washed off in the flood, of course. I put on the sequins, one by one . . . it's the only way to do it, hein? . . . I redid my beauty spot ninety-three-and-a-half times and I moved it twenty-six times because where Elizabeth Taylor's got hers doesn't look good on me. . . . but of course I wound up putting it in the same place. . . . For once Cuirette didn't laugh. . . . He watched me very seriously. . . . Chriss, if I'd known, if I'd even suspected, I'd have taken my nail file and shiskebbed his two eyeballs. . . . Anyway by six o'clock I was ready for my dress, but the party wasn't until midnight. So I sat myself down, turned on the TV, and from six 'til eleven-thirty I didn't budge. For five-and-a-half hours I watched the CBC Nellies do their numbers, right to the bitter end of *Appelez-moi Lise!*"

In the end Hosanna decides to stop the pretenses and be himself.

## Indians and Ecstasies

GEORGE RYGA's plays have been called "peasant tragedies" and his two major ones, *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* and *Grass and Wild Strawberries*, combine ballads and dialogues, film projections and recorded voices. Ryga is Canada's playwright of social protest but his plays are not simply agitation-propaganda dramas.

His questions have no obvious answers — his audiences are more likely to feel that they are waiting for Godot than for Lefty.

*Ecstasy*, which critic Brian Parker considers the most moving play that Canada has produced, is more than the story of the destruction of an Indian girl. In Ryga's words it is ". . . a story of people in conflict struggling at a disadvantage. . . . People who are forgotten are not forgetting."

In *Indian*, an earlier work, this confrontation between the despised natural man and the exalted artificial man (bland, colourless, conforming and frightened) is depicted most directly:

AGENT: No. I walked back to camp . . . My friend an' I had supper and we drove home that night . . .

INDIAN: Forget all about moose you hurt?

AGENT: No. I did worry about what happened to him!

INDIAN: You dream about him that night? . . . Runnin', bawling with pain?

AGENT: What the hell . . . dream about a moose? There's more important things to worry about, I'm telling you.

INDIAN: Then you not worry at all. You forget as soon as you can. Moose not run away from you — you run away from moose!

AGENT: I didn't . . . hey, you're crazy! (*Moves toward car offstage, but Indian jumps forward and stops him.*) Here! You leave me alone, I'm telling you . . . You got a lot of wild talk in your head, but you can't push your weight around with me . . . I'm getting out of here . . . Hey!