

ARTS

Big themes yield little results

Rexy!
Workshop West (Theatre 3)
till Oct. 4

Catholics
Shocter Theatre (Citadel)
till Oct. 18

review by Jens Andersen

It would be an understatement to merely say that the raw material from which the above plays were hewed has possibilities. Consider: in one case the play centres on the crafty, cowardly and slightly deranged Canadian Prime Minister who managed to hold office longer than any other Commonwealth leader. In the other, the topic is the effect of modern ecumenical reform and modern doubt on the church.

Millions of words of fiction have already been spilled on both subjects, and many of them are very good indeed (for instance "The Mackenzie King Memorial Society" by Mordecai Richler, and Sinclair Lewis' *Elmer Gantry*).

Of the two, *Rexy!* is perhaps the worse. The program announces that the purpose of the play is to "capture the essences, rather than the historical detail of the characters and issues presented." In fact it captures neither characters nor issues.

Mackenzie King's neuroses, for instance, are presented in thick gobs of soap-opera Freudianism. One tires quickly of King sobbing and snivelling before his mother's ghost as she yells, nags and coddles him.

Granted, King probably hallucinated her lecturing him, and granted, he probably submitted to her meekly, more often than not, but I suspect that in real life the process was not accompanied by all the moaning, screeching and eye-rolling that appeared on the Theatre 3 stage.

King's hypocritical and back-stabbing nature are likewise blown up to surrealistic proportions, as are his exultant power-tripping, his mean-spiritedness, his love for his dog, etc. The result is simply another super neurotic caricature villain.

Ditto for Roosevelt, who comes across as a cartoon of a back-slapping, back-stabbing yankee; and Lester Pearson, who becomes a mere bumbling, lipping clown; and King's floozie Enid Simpson who is predictably loud and dumb.

Lord Riverdale, Colonel Ralston and General McNaughton, in contrast, were relatively well cast as businesslike public servants. Even so, a little tomfoolery was superimposed on their characters, as when McNaughton does a little victory jump

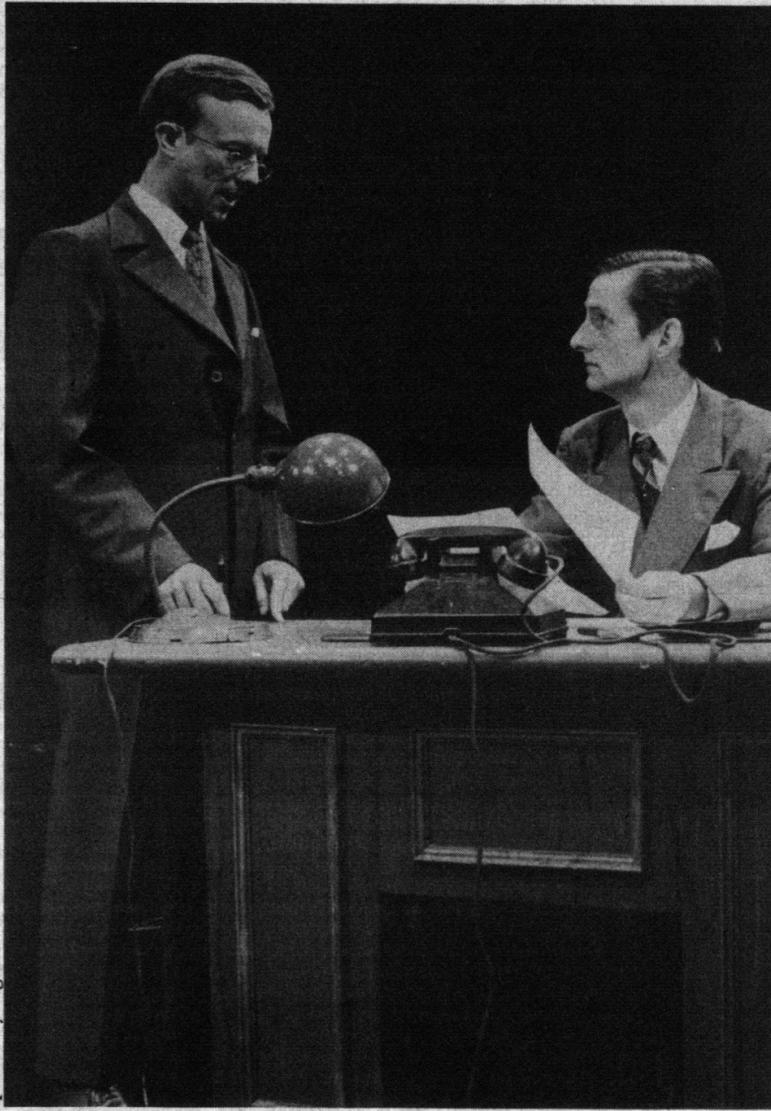


photo Ray Giguere

Lord Riverdale, played by Christopher Gaze, gives Mackenzie King (right), played by Frank Turner, exactly ten minutes to sign a treaty. King doesn't really want to but he gives in when he is promised centre spot in a photo with Roosevelt and Churchill

while marching from the meeting where King has appointed him Minister of War.

The scriptwriter or the director apparently couldn't resist cornball touches like this, for they are all over the play:

Roosevelt tells King at one point, "You have a mind like a beaver trap." On another occasion he says, "Tomorrow, if nothing goes wrong, Japan will attack Pearl Harbour." King's dog Pat tells him, "I have

a bone to pick with you." And when Pearson evacuates the London Embassy to the Ladies' College at Malvick he warns the evacuees, "Don't get any ideas."

As low comedy the play is fairly passable, but since it dwells also on the emotion-drenched ghost scenes, and King's swinishness in handling the World War II draft question, *Rexy!* demands to be taken more seriously. Unfortunately these scenes are rather overdone.

Catholics is somewhat more subtle, but again there is the *de rigueur* colourful goof (the monastery cook), the agonized protagonist (the doubt-riddled Abbot O'Malley), and the caricatured secondary characters (like the gung-ho advocate of the Latin mass and the nut-case young monk who obsessively follows his lead).

In addition, the characters have a tendency to be mere mouthpieces for the various religious viewpoints being dealt with, at the expense of human plausibility. The "revolutionary" Catholic plenipotentiary Kinsella, for instance, who comes to the monastery to cajole the monks back to the English mass, has no visible religious fervour (though like many activists he is hot against oppression). Yet when Abbot O'Malley confesses his faithlessness to him Kinsella acts horrified. Either Kinsella should display enough piety to justify such horror, or his horror should be downplayed a little.

Some of the plot devices are pretty thin too: as when Kinsella overlooks the fact the O'Malley can appeal his decisions. Such ignorance in a high ecclesiastic is very unlikely, and I get the impression it was used only to give O'Malley the appearance of being a sharp cookie.

All in all, however, the religious controversy about which language mass is given in, and the larger issue of how religious men deal with God's apparent indifference to man, are competently, if not superbly delineated. In the script, for instance, there is only a hint at the real reason for the power of the Latin mass, namely its awesome beauty.

But perhaps here I am unqualified to comment, for all theological arguments bore me unless there is some mischievous agnostic involved, making suggestions like Mark Twain's proposal (in *A Connecticut Yankee*) that clergymen should be hitched to electrical dynamos so their frenzies would be of some palpable benefit to mankind.

To my dismay there were no such high-voltage heresies in the play.

Up and Coming

MUSIC

Louise Bessette: October 18; Fine Arts Room 1-29; 12 Noon; free admission.

The winner of the 1981 S.C. Eckhardt - Gramatte Competition will perform on piano.

LOCAL RECREATION

The Villians, with Informer; Saturday; Dinwoodie Lounge; 8:00pm; \$6.00.

Alan Niester of the estimable *Toronto Globe and Mail* says, "The Villians should not be missed. The British quintet, now based in Vancouver, not only specialize in the high energy Ska and bluesbeat based rock made popular by such bands as Madness and the Specials, but is as entertaining and danceable as any of them."

Snakedancer; Thursday to Saturday; RATT; cover \$2.00

Their music is rhythm and blues.

GALLERIES

Pork Roasts; Oct. 1 to 25; Ring House Gallery; weekdays 11:00 - 4:00 pm., Thursday 11:00 - 9:00 pm., Sunday 2:00 - 5:00 pm.

250 Feminist cartoons from both sides of the Atlantic. Recommended for engineering studs and other such smug fellows.

Yuriko Igarashi; till Oct. 29; Fireweed Gallery; opens today.

Her first show of batik-watercolour florals.

Gateway seeks literature

As a result of many inquiries the Arts Editor is now considering running a literary supplement to the Arts page some time this fall. All poets and other writers are invited to bring their masterpieces to room 282 SUB any time after 12 noon Thursday or Friday.

New age for classics

Pro Coro Canada
First Presbyterian Church, Sun. Sept. 27

Review by Patricia Just

The debut of Pro Coro Canada on Sunday September 27 marks a new age for lovers of classical music in Alberta. In a program entitled Virtuoso Choir Music, the 24-member chamber choir dispensed with the notion that all you can hear in Edmonton are the three B's and Mozart.

The performance, attended by 650 people, featured works from such little-known composers as Poulenc, Britten, Peterson-Berger, Monteverdi, Edlund, Alfven and Ligeti. This is a reflection of the training of the conductor, Edmontonian Michel Gervais, who after graduating from the U of A, completed his musical education in Europe and most notably under Eric Ericson in Sweden.

Most of the faults in the performance were related to the youth of the choir and not to technical imperfections. There was some fumbling of pages and also a few occasional off-cue solos not meant to exist, along with a little bit of strain on the faces of the members. But despite all this, and a bit of a lull in the program caused by a long production of Monteverdi's Fifth book of madrigals, plus a few wandering notes in Part 1 of Ligeti's *Zwei a cappella Chöre*, the choir received and deserved a standing ovation.

Pro Coro Canada and its offshoot,

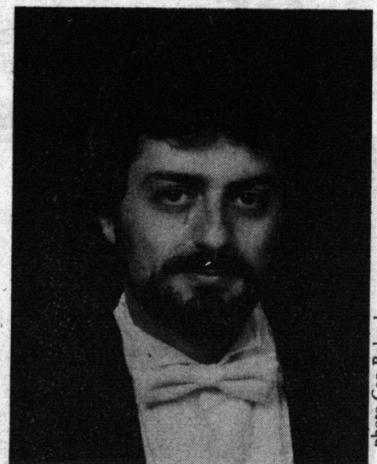


photo Con Boland

Michel Gervais, conductor of ProCoro

ConSept, should be around for a long time, for with experience the choir will improve even more on their already salable product. The next concert of Pro Coro Canada will be on October 25, at the First Presbyterian Church, when the seven performers known as ConSept will further explore the works of Josquin, Monteverdi, Reger, Poulenc and Berio. Last night's concert was recorded by the CBC and will be presented on February 6 on Music West (740 AM, 93.3 FM).