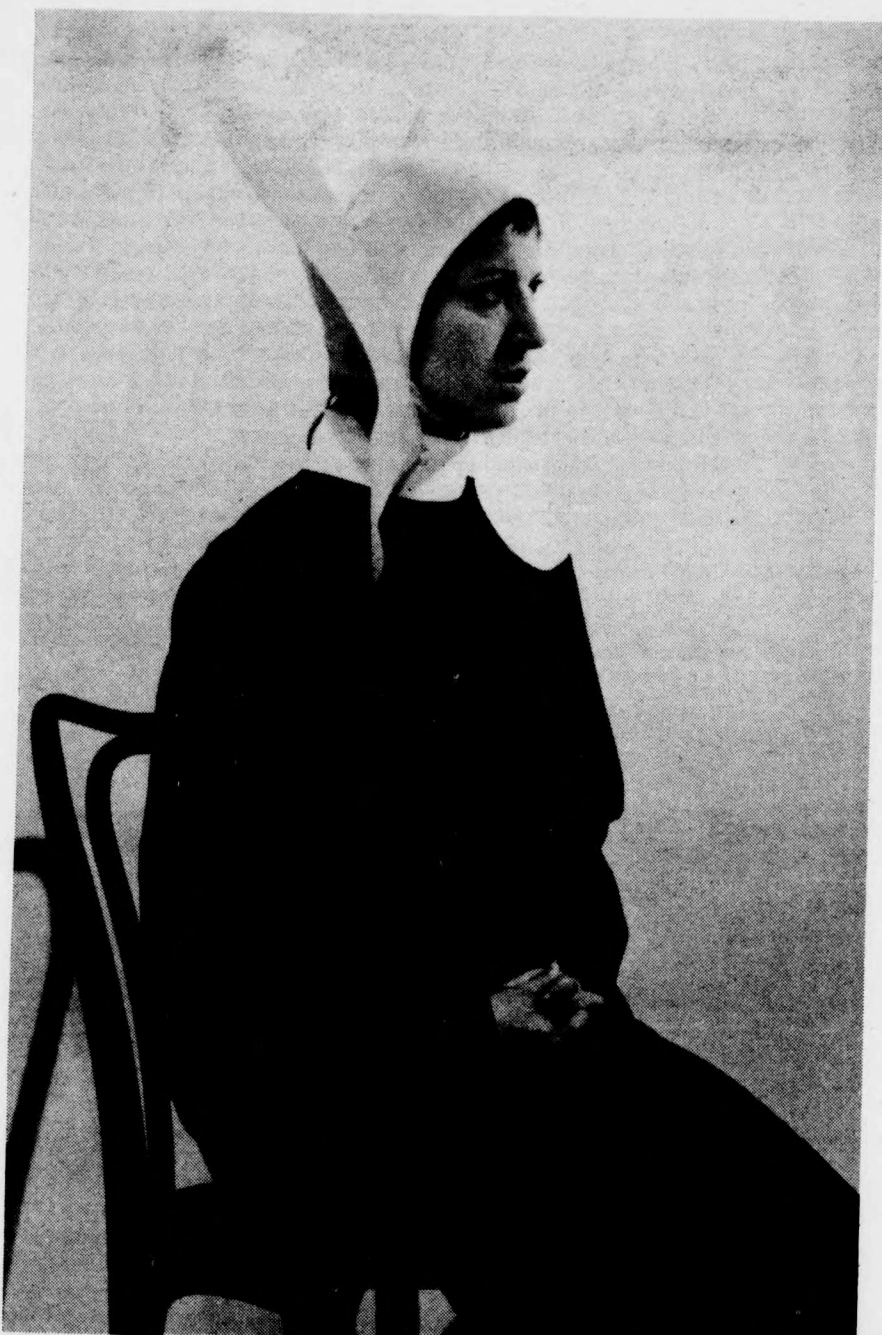


**Male characters absurd**

**"Strawberry Fields" is very self-indulgent**



Le Fou et la Nonne at the P'tit Bonheur tells the story of an institutionalized poet who falls in love with a nun. Beatrice Fleischer, another nun, looks somewhat shocked by the whole affair.

By DANNY ZANBILOWICZ

At one point in Mike Hollingsworth's play, Strawberry Fields, at Factory Theatre, Brad Ruddy says, "Hitchhiking can turn you into a real misanthrope." Watching Hollingsworth's play over a long period of time can probably have the same effect.

Hollingsworth lets us know in no uncertain terms that he thinks people aren't very nice. Any comparisons between Hollingsworth's characters and animals would serve to belittle the animals. For his characters are violent and perverted as only human beings can be.

The actions of the three male characters are really quite absurd unless one accepts the play's proposition that individuals reveal their deepest darkest drives when they are in the drug-induced nether-world of the stoned. After accepting this premise, we must regard the events within the context of a dream. The characters are stoned; their subconscious is surfacing and determining their actions, nobody quite knows what's going on. This sense of the surreal is in sharp contrast to the starkly realistic props and effects.

It all happens amid the rubble of a pop festival's aftermath. The stage is a studied mess of waste. After a quick series of lines in which Hollingsworth satisfies his anal fixation, the characters proceed to reveal that the lowest-common-denominator of man's motivation is a mixture of the sex-drive, in this case homosexual, and violence. Both urges are graphically satisfied on stage.

The audience is treated to the cut-up corpse of what is ostensibly a dog, a plethora of plastic phallusses, and a ketchupy castration.

Hollingsworth allows us a clear look at his strange fantasies, but are we really interested in them? The play worked best in the first half, when allusions to violence and sex were suggested by the actors' dialogue. The comparative subtlety created some good dramatic tension. As things became more and more explicit they also became increasingly boring. It was about at this point that the play became a work of fatuous self-indulgence.

The actors didn't seem to mind. Brian Condie as Danny gave as convincing an imitation of a grand mal epileptic seizure that an audience would want to endure. Allan Harmon as Larry started off resembling a beautiful stallion, whinnying and strutting across the stage. At the end of the play he seemed like the giant Cyclops, blinded and humiliated by puny Odysseus. Brian Ruddy was fine as Harry.

An earlier production of this play included a warning that some people might find the material offensive. In fact the gentleman sitting next to me left in the middle, muttering something about the decline of Western civilization as reflected in the decadence of its art. That's a bit strong. If the play would have been better, more applicable, then its theme as expressed in the material could be construed as offensive. But as it is, a closed system unto itself, it's quite harmless.

**"Le tou et la nonne" top quality**

By ALAN RISEN

Le Theatre du P'tit Bonheur continued its program of presenting top quality French plays in Toronto with the opening of Le Fou et La Nonne last Thursday.

The play, about an institutionalized poet who falls in love with a nun, comes off well because director John Van Burek dispenses with a realistic approach and sets the play in an atmosphere of fantasy.

Had Van Burek attempted to portray a straight, real-life situation, the play would have fallen

flat. By approaching the way he did he not only added a certain flavour to the action, he also gave his cast the flexibility to indulge in the crowd-pleasing antics of character acting that would be out of place in a straight drama.

The set design of Kathryn De Vos Miller complimented the play without detracting from the action. The set added to this surrealistic feeling, by distorting ever so gently the cubic dimensions of a four-walled cell.

The actor who best took advantage of the antics was Jean-Marc Amyot

playing a psycho-therapist who himself goes crazy.

Marie-Paule Broschart as the love-sick nun also was quite good.

The P'tit Bonheur, with sponsorship from various organizations is the only French language theatre in Toronto. Although its plays are aimed at the city's French-speaking quarter, the York French department might do well to look into it as an available outlet for its more advanced language training courses.

Student prices are \$1.50 and the present play will run until Feb. 3.

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