

A scene from *Booster McCrane, P.M.*

## McCrane P.M. Lacks Focus

By JASON SHERMAN

**B**ooster McCrane, P.M., playing downstairs at Toronto Free Theatre until the end of October, raises questions about artistic integrity and ability. To begin with: why was this play written? Does the author have any idea at all what this play was supposed to be about? Why has Guy Sprung, the Free Theatre's artistic director, chosen to give a play so desperately in need of revision a full-scale production?

If the answers to these questions have anything to do with Sprung's apparent desire to be the champion of Canadian playwrights (a worthy cause), one has to wonder whether Sprung's criteria for a script being producible can all be boiled down to one fact: written by a Canadian.

What's wrong with this play? It has no focus: for example, writer D.S. Craig's characters are as flat as his jokes, and about as worn. If the characters are not one-dimensional reproductions of dull theatric archetypes, they are full-blown cultural stereotypes, the kind we all know and hate and stopped laughing at after the first season of *All in the Family*.

The Americans in the play are a pushy, loudmouth Southwestern American given the incredibly witty name Smokescreen (ho-ho-ho), and a black Marine made out to be some crazed military Sambo. Smokescreen is a slightly less affable version of Foghorn Leghorn. He represents big dumb arrogant proud greedy America—so what else is new? As for the soldier, he becomes a bodyguard in the service of the Canadian Prime Minister. Heavy symbolism there, D.S.

Now, there is nothing wrong with having characters who are merely there to advance the plot. But it doesn't appear that Craig had this in mind. It's a problem indicative of the whole play. At one moment it is a farce, at another a serious political statement, at another absurdism, at another melodrama.

This only serves to alienate the audience and show that the playwright isn't sure where he wants to go with his material. What would be best for *Booster McCrane* would be to follow the tone established in the first few (very promising) minutes.

We are told that the new Canadian Prime Minister is the leader of an obscure populist party from the West. We are told he is in hiding. All preposterous but we believe it because the tone does not falter. At the same time, because the reporter reacts in a realistic way to the news—incredulous—the audience should expect that the play will be both realistic and comic.

But it is when Craig tries for the realistic and absurd—Canada declaring war on the United States—that the play begins to sound false. It is this more than anything else that indicates the playwright isn't sure himself what he was play-wrighting about.

Is it just to tell Canada again that their economy is controlled by the United States? Is it to stun us with the news that Canadians invest more in the United States than in their own country? Is it a play about the inability of the little man to do anything for himself in a country ruled by corporations? We don't know because Craig never says enough about any one point to make it a point.

Now, as with any production that has as its basis a poor script, this production is flawed. It has no direction. It has poor pacing, moving slowly when it should be doing the opposite, and at times standing still.

This is due largely to the dull dialogue. But the set doesn't help much either. Does the Prime Minister's office really harbor chairs and tables stolen from Goodwill boxes? The portrait of an anaemic-looking John A. Macdonald sets the mood of the room perfectly: horribly sombre and horribly inappropriate.

One feels sorry for the actors. They are given lines that do not convey what they feel. Booster McCrane meekly accepts his defeat. We are to believe that all he (literally) fought for means nothing to him. The Prime Minister's secretary can't believe what's going on but can only say oh this is so ridiculous and just wait until Parliament reconvenes.



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Sat. Oct. 22, 1983

## AGENDA

9:30 a.m. - 9:50 a.m.

### Plenary Session —Stedman Lecture "A"

10:00 a.m. - 11:20 a.m.

### Seminars

- A. So You Want To Be In Radio ... ?
- B. Communication Skills
- C. Production

11:30 a.m. - 12:50 p.m.

- D. News
- E. New Directions In The Media
- F. Programming
- G. Advertising

1:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.

### Lunch—Vanier College Dining Room

2:10 p.m. - 3:50 p.m.

### Careers In The Media

4:00 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.

### Seminars

- J. New Music
- K. Records and Promotion
- L. Public Affairs
- M. On Air

5:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

### Reception Vanier Senior Common Room Radio York

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### Radio York Dance

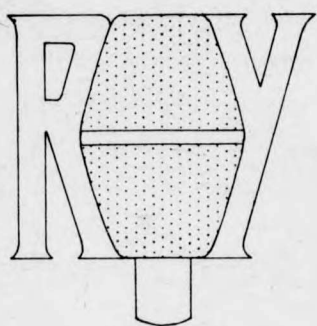
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