

"absorbing." In the last few years, the Festival had shown signs of middle age. The acting and directing were uninspired — sometimes plain bad — and at times the costume department seemed to have had a higher priority than the performers. It was the blurring of priorities that Phillips promised to correct. The result was a dazzling leap from the fifties to the seventies. To judge from the cheers and sustained applause following *Twelfth Night* and *Measure for Measure*, Stratford's new look was as popular with audiences as with critics.

As Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* and Angelo in *Measure for Measure*, Brian Bedford made the difficult transition from theatrical prominence to true stardom. During the letter scene in *Twelfth Night*, he made what is usually ten minutes' traffic on stage into a virtuoso lesson in how to extract the hidden comic nuances from Shakespeare's lines. For once Malvolio was a human character rather than a caricature of hypocrisy.

The question after the opening of *Twelfth Night* was what the Festival could do to sustain the pace. *Measure for Measure* was the answer. It is a difficult play. The mood is grim, and the plot creaks with the strain of having to end happily.

This was Phillips' play from start to finish. (*Twelfth Night* was directed by David Jones.) It was, quite simply, the finest production of *Measure for Measure* in a decade — possibly since the closing of the English theatres by the

Puritans in 1642. The explanation is as simple as it is hard to put into practice. As Henry James remarked to a young man who asked him the secret of writing a good novel, "the secret is to be very intelligent." Phillips and Bedford take the play seriously. Not as a collection of archaic conventions punctuated with fine moments of poetry, but as an in-depth study of strong personalities disintegrating under stress. Bedford's Angelo is a senior public official, so assured that he never raises his voice. In Bedford's delivery, Angelo's psychology came through with perfect clarity.

It is a tribute to Martha Henry that her Isabella was, for the most part, a match for Bedford's Angelo. Her emotions tended to be generalized — anger, compassion or grief, for example — rather than expressions of a unique personality, but the general level of her performance was excellent. In the final scene, when Isabella must renounce the convent in order to marry the Duke of Vienna, we fully share her anguish as she turns from the certainties of a life consecrated to God, to the compromises and imperfections of marriage.

Robin Phillips' decision to give top priority to acting and directing has produced a welcome dividend. This summer the Festival mounted a total of fourteen plays compared to nine last summer.

It was a season to remember.

## Après l'Equipe le déluge

CANADA'S THEATRE began with Marc Lescarbot's Théâtre de Neptune at Champlain's settlement at Port Royal in 1606, and its modern renaissance occurred in Québec ten or twenty years before it began in Toronto.

French-Canadian theatres and, most particularly, French-Canadian playwrights had (and have) advantages over their English-speaking peers; the Québec audience is not diverted by the products of New York since it enjoys its own distinctive culture.

Further the Québécois playwright has a constantly available dramatic backdrop — a country divided by language, and a province whose wealth and industry have been dominated, to a degree, by the English-speaking population.

Theatre has always played a vital role in the culture of Québec. The modern theatre began with the creation of Compagnons by Father Le-gault in 1938. Pierre Dagenais founded l'Equipe in 1943 and in the explosive fifties, le Théâtre

du Nouveau Monde arrived, followed by Theatre Club, Théâtre du Rideau Vert, Théâtre de poche Anjou, La Poudrière, la Comédie canadienne, les Apprentis-sorciers and l'Egrégore.

The post-World War II playwrights focused on the society of ordinary people; the protagonist was no longer a hero — instead he was the pathetic central figure of Gratien Gélinas' *Tit-Coq*, produced in 1948, or the dishonest trade union official in Claude Jasmin's *Tuez le veau gras*, produced in 1964.

Michel Tremblay, 33, is perhaps Québec's foremost playwright and one of the few whose works have been translated into English and produced in Toronto and on Broadway. He writes in *joual*, the street language of French Canada, and the society he depicts and attacks is a shocking society, closely observed. His *Hosanna* has been produced in Montréal, Paris, Toronto and Ottawa and at the Bijou Theater on Broadway.