

'Philadelphia' is an Irish comedy of "exceptional good quality"

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By Philip Hinman

Last week brought to a close the production of the first play of the season at the Citadel. Rehearsal for their second play, which will open Wednesday, Nov. 13 and run to Dec. 7 is now underway. The play they will be doing is Brian Friel's Irish comedy 'Philadelphia Here I Come'.

Brian Friel is one of the more 'heavy weight' dramatists writing for the theatre today, and 'Philadelphia Here I Come', his fourth play, is doubtless the finest thing to have come from his pen to date. The play was first produced in Dublin Sept. 1964. In Feb. 1966 it opened in New York. At the present time, 'Philadelphia' has the distinction of having had the longest run on Broadway of any Irish play (G. B. Shaw and O'Casey included). It is now published by the Viking Press.

I find the play to be of exceptional quality. Because of Friel's techniques and dramatic point of view, a comparison of him to O'Casey and Chekhov is inevitable. It is a comedy only in the 'Chekhovian sense' as one New York critic put it. Director of the Citadel production said this of the play: "Philadelphia is a funny play. It is a sad play. It is a play filled with pain at times. But it is so honestly and compassionately written that the pain itself envelopes the audience like a warm fire." Certainly there is in the play as much to cry about as there is cause for laughter in spite of the numerous 'delightfully comic moments'.

The plot of 'Philadelphia' centres around a young Irishman, Gar O'Donnell, who decided to emigrate to the States. The action of the play takes place during the night before and the morning of his departure from Ireland to become a part of the Great American Dream in Philadelphia.

Before Gar leaves he is confronted with all of his reasons for wanting to leave—and stay. While he longs for the golden land of dreams-come-true, he is still possessed of his love of his native Ireland. He must say goodbye to his comrades and look forward to the unwelcome and humiliating affections of his Aunt Lizzy with whom he will stay in America. Gar will be glad to get away from his overbearing, penny pinching father-employer, yet is truly saddened by his inability to cross the cold chasm of silence that separates the two. A farewell visit from his old sweetheart Kate, who tired of waiting finally married another, still retaining her affection for Gar, also complicates Gar's dilemma.

The audience will be able to gain a rather special insight into the character of Gar O'Donnell inasmuch as his role is played by two actors at the same time. The audience will see both the 'public Gar' and the 'private Gar'. "Public and Private are two views of the one man. Public is the Gar that people see, talk to, talk about. Private is the unseen man, the man within, the conscience, the alter ego, the secret thoughts, the id." Thus the

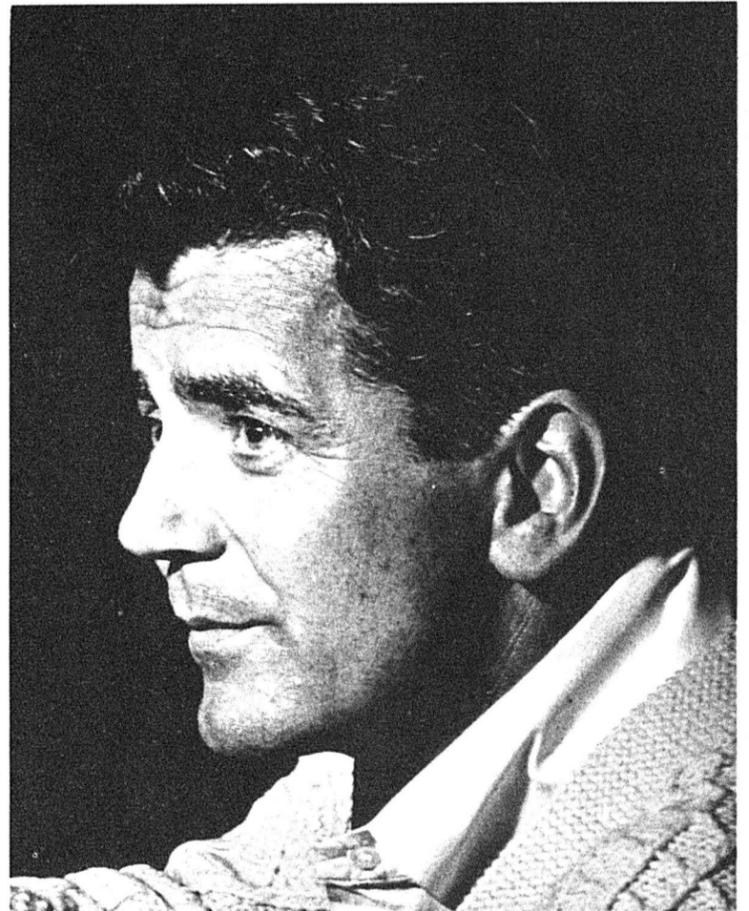
audience is forced into a simultaneous awareness of what the one man says and does and what he would like to say and do. This duality of role matched with flashback scenes into the past provides a delightful and tender understanding of the main character of the play.

Just as outstanding as the play is itself are the people who are putting it on. A rather illustrious crew indeed. Artistic Director of the Citadel, Sean Mulcahy will direct the production and play one of the major roles, that of the private Gar. Mr. Mulcahy is Irish-born and a product of the Abbey Theatre of Dublin. Some of Mulcahy's achievements in Canada include being the assistant director at the Shaw Festival at Niagara-on-the-Lake, a director for Montreal's experimental Instant Theatre, a actor-director at the Beaverbrook Playhouse in Fredericton as well as his work with the CBC. He has also given several lecture series at such places as U of Toronto. Incidentally Mr. Mulcahy will be lecturing for the U of A Drama Dept. later on this year.

Also Irish-born and again a product of the famed Abbey Theatre is Josephine Fitzgerald. She comes with an extremely rich background; some of the directors she has worked under being G. B. Shaw, W. B. Yeats, Lady Gregory and Robert Courtenidge. She will do the role of Madge, the O'Donnells' housekeeper. Irish-born Hagan Beggs (public Gar, has appeared in more than a hundred CBC dramas including the lead in 'The Lady's Not For Burning' and 'Man Born to be King'. Gar's father will be done by Sidney Brown. Brown has a wide background in Canadian radio, TV, and theatre, having appeared in every filmed series made in Canada. Also appearing in 'Philadelphia' will be David Yorston, Denis Kalman, Hamish Robertson and Carolyne Woodstock who are staying over from the 'Odd Couple'. Other members of the cast will be Orest Kinasewich, Alfred Gallagher, Alan Stebbings, Vernis McCuaig and Mel Tuck. Tuck is a U of A drama student and may be remembered by some for his roles in Studio Theatre's 'Godot' and 'Volpone' last year. He will do Joe and is also Mulcahy's understudy.

Other forthcoming productions at the Citadel are 'Irma La Douce' (Dec. 11-Jan. 4), 'The Right Honourable Gentleman' (Jan. 15-Feb. 8) and two G. B. Shaw plays, 'Village Wooing' and 'Dark Lady of the Sonnets' (Feb. 19-Mar. 15). The two final plays of the season have not yet been announced. I hope that U of A students will take advantage of the fine entertainment being offered by Edmonton's Professional Theatre. Tickets for the Citadel may be picked up at the box office.

Just a note for those many avid fans of Jacobean Drama. Ben Jonson's 'The Alchemist' will be playing in Calgary at Theatre Calgary from Nov. 20 to Nov. 30.



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