

# the ARTS

## Huxley Hustlers on CBC radio

It is now ten years since one of the world's most literate men, Aldous Huxley, died of cancer, but Ideas, on CBC-AM Radio preserves the memory of the man who enriched the world with his keen perception.

The great essayist and novelist, who foresaw the Middle East oil crisis years before it happened, is the subject of five programs, Aldous Huxley and Beyond, Mondays - February 4-March 4, 11:03 p.m. EST on Ideas.

The series is a repeat of the one run on Ideas on the CBC-FM network in December. The programs probe the life and work of the author, the scientist-manque, and mystic. Throughout the series, Huxley's voice, recorded in interviews as early as 1938 and as recent as 1961, provides insight into the nature of this creative, visionary author. (Huxley died November 22, 1963 in Los Angeles, the same day as U.S. President Kennedy was assassinated).

The Ideas series begins with the background of the

Huxleys, one of Britain's most literate families. Huxley, born July 25, 1894 in Surrey, was the grandson of Thomas Henry Huxley, the famed naturalist who supported Charles Darwin's theories of evolution; and the son of Leonard Huxley, a headmaster and editor. His brother is Sir Julian Huxley, the famous biologist.

While attending Eton, Huxley became blind at 16, and was forced to abandon his projected career in biology. His lifelong struggle to regain and retain his vision, is the subject of the second program, which is full of anecdotes and present-day opinion about this complex character.

Also discussed are his religious nature and mysticism which led him into his controversial experiments with psychedelic drugs.

Huxley's best-known novel, *Brave New World* (1932), is discussed in the context of today's society, by such celebrated social commentators and thinkers as psychologist B.F. Skinner, Alvin Toffler, and Buckminster Fuller.

Ideas spinning off from *Brave New World* and a later novel, *Island* (1962), are examined in terms of developments which Huxley foresaw, and which are currently underway. Present-day experts also take a look into the future of our society.

Produced by Patricia MacFarlane, the series was written by Gary McKeehan and Andre Ransberry. Among the personalities interviewed

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## Sganarelle premiers

On Tuesday and Wednesday evenings (February 5-6) at Convocation Hall, the University of Alberta's Department of Music presented an operatic double bill which included what the program generously called an "abbreviated version" of Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*, and the world premiere performance of *Sganarelle*, a comic opera by Dr. Violet Archer, a staff member in the department.

The Department of Music offers a professional program in music, but the performance of *Orfeo* appeared to beg the professional question altogether. The entire production was decidedly unprofessional in its rather cavalier approach to the composer, his music, and the genre of opera in general. Of the more than fifty set pieces which comprise the original score more than thirty were purged, a disproportionate number for even an "abbreviated version". One wonders at the professionalism of reducing an entire evening's opera into three-quarters of an hour.

Whether the production was designed to flesh out an evening's entertainment, or whether it was intended merely to provide employment for those singers not involved in *Sganarelle* - whatever the reason, the effect was makeshift; it reeked of nothing so much as filler. From the

unsuggestive and spartan setting, the ineffectual lighting, the vapid staging, the precarious ensemble and balance (between stage and pit), the costumes which ranged from the merely adequate (*Euridice*) to the absurd (*Amor*), to the lacklustre singing, the performance suggested that *Orfeo* had been give leftover time, effort, and general consideration.

If opera as an art-form is to survive, productions such as *Orfeo* should not be paraded and flaunted as examples. Instead, the Voice-Opera division of the Music Department should inculcate a responsibility, on the part of its students, to opera as a genre, with concern shown for dramatic and musical continuity. There are numerous one-act or short operas which could have been performed, both economically and in their entirety - ranging from Telleman's *Pimpinone* and Mozart's *Schauspieldirektor*, to Stravinsky's *Mavra*.

The cast included Andrea Mellis (*Orfeo*), Beverley Cohen (*Euridice*), and Frances Dietz (*Amor*), all of whom had been plagued by illness during the preceding week and who, consequently, were not heard to their best advantage.

In contrast to the soporific effect of *Orfeo*, the second work of the evening, Dr. Archer's *Sganarelle* (based upon a free English translation

of a play by Moliere) seized one's attention from the overture and retained it until the finale. *Sganarelle* is a delightful melange of amorous misadventure and misunderstanding - a type of vehicle favored by both Rossini and Mozart in their dramatic comedies. Although the drama may be classified as anachronistic, Dr. Archer's music and approach are decidedly not. On the contrary, her music is very much in a twentieth century idiom (although, fortunately, it is not as esoteric as much of the music which is coming from the vanguard of contemporary composers), and is readily accessible.

Dr. Archer had set herself a difficult task in attempting musically to depict characters who take themselves seriously but who appear hilarious to the audience. Her music succeeds primarily by displaying a highly stylized, satiric, tongue-in-cheek humour where, without sufficient restraint, it might have fallen to the level of slapstick.

The only disturbing musical elements to be found in the entire opera were the rather repetitious quintet and the attenuated finale. Due to its length, the finale sacrificed a potentially tight and crisp ending to the concept and tradition of a grandiose finale. Much of the freshness and impetus which the opera had previously sustained was considerably dissipated during this scene. It was during the finale, significantly, that stage director Rowland Holt Wilson's imagination seemed also to lag. Earlier in the opera he had displayed his talents to the fullest, and had presented for the most part a fast moving and, at times, even zany comedy, with stage business which always appeared to be motivated. By way of contrast, the finale appeared merely busy with action going on long after there appeared any legitimate reason for it doing so.

The cast demonstrated admirable vocal and acting ability. In the title role, George Cotton projected a constant befuddlement with a control which was never missing but never ostentatious, and he was particularly effective in the Armour Scene. His voice, a full baritone, was equal to all the tasks assigned to it. Soprano Betty Kolodziej, as Celia, was pleasing to look at, agreeable to listen to, and she fainted most decorously in the opening scene. Nigel Lemon presented a foppish Osric-like Lelie; his clarion tenor voice tended to dominate ensembles, but was heard to considerable effect in solo passages. Also features were Jacqueline Preuss as Madame Sganarelle and Barbara Prowse as the maid.

The orchestra, composed of members from the Department of Music's St. Cecilia Orchestra performed with spirited competence in *Sganarelle* and demonstrated a more inconsistent approach to *Orfeo*. Conductor Alfred Strombergs seemed rather casual about *Orfeo* but appeared to be more highly motivated by *Sganarelle*.

Sets and costumes for *Sganarelle* designed by Larry Kadlec and Vivienne McRoberts respectively, were entirely professional in concept and execution. The burst of applause which greeted the set on opening night was completely justified and it set the tone for the entire production.

F. Crory

## French Theatre disappointing

It is with regret that I write this review of the latest effort of the Theatre Francais d'Edmonton, *L'Effet des Rayons Gamma sur les Vieux-Garcons* because the production does not live up to the standards of earlier productions. The play is a

translation, by Michel Tremblay, of Paul Zindel's *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-In-The-Moon Marigolds*. Tremblay has made a good adaptation in that the play becomes Quebecois. The regret I feel is due not to the quality of the translation but rather to the quality of the production itself.


The Theatre has attempted to give a 'total theatre' effect. The director, Jean-Marcel Ducaume, has added rock music and slides to the production, in the hopes of 'universalizing' the play, one presumes. As if a traditional play were unable to be universal! The rock music was far too loud for the small theatre. This set the tone of over-effect which marred the entire production.

The slides which preceded the play itself were disordered and inconclusive. The manner in which they were presented was weak, due to the fact that the center screen obscured the playing area. It had to be raised before the play could begin. This caused a schism between the play itself and the visual effects. The two techniques did not work as a unified whole to present an art form in harmony with all its parts. Rather, we were given two shows - the traditional play, and a slide show tacked on at various intervals. The slides did not complement the play, nor the play the slides. The problem here lies most probably with the lack of technical sophistication in the theatre itself. The Theatre Francais just does not have the expertise nor the tremendous resources required to produce 'total theatre' of the sort they attempted.

Even with this failure the production could have been good if the play itself were

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