

STRATFORD OF CANADA ON BROADWAY

"The soundest classical company in North America." That was Brooks Atkinson's verdict in the New York Times the morning after the Festival Players of Stratford had invaded Broadway with "Tamburlaine The Great". Broadway visits being so unusual in Canada's history, this report has been prepared to share the experience with the posts abroad and those in Ottawa who could not see the play in Toronto or New York.

There was drama and suspense that lasted through the evening, through the party after the show until the morning papers arrived and the great cast and the Canadian visitors learned together that Brooks Atkinson had gone all out and John Chapman in The News had been equally enthusiastic. What a jubilant shout went up! For Atkinson and Chapman - class and mass - had approved.

It was the first professional production in the United States of Christopher Marlowe's "Tamburlaine The Great". Brooks Atkinson said that the debut arrived 369 years late.

It was the first time a Canadian production captured Broadway and its critics. There have been Canadian shows before but none receiving quite such acclaim. It gave the Canadians a thrill to see the production billed as by the now world-famous company from Stratford, Ontario. With the exception of the magnificent Anthony Quayle from Stratford, England, and Coral Browne from Australia, the company of nearly a hundred were Canadians. Quickly a correction! Stratford, Ontario, did not have enough virgins so some were picked up in New York. In the production the virgins doubled as courtesans.

The show was mounted in Stratford, another Canadian first, and the Stratford Festival paid out \$40,000 for the sets and properties and costumes.

The opening was very much a Canadian night. The Red Ensign and Old Glory draped the boxes and the gallery railing. There was some discussion whether it would be The Queen or O Canada with the Star Spangled Banner. It was solved by the orchestra. A special rehearsal would be necessary if O Canada was chosen. It was fitting because without Guthrie and Quayle Canada's success would not have been.

The party before the show started at 5:30 in the residence of the Consul General with Mr. and Mrs. H.G. Norman and the Canadian Representative to the United Nations and Mrs. R.A. MacKay joint hosts. This party represented a problem in how to speed the parting guest as the apartment is on the 15th floor. There is only one elevator and it takes over 3 minutes to make the round trip. The show started at 7:30 and there were 80 guests. They included the ambassadors of four or five Commonwealth countries in Washington, the Commonwealth ambassadors to the U.N., Tom Patterson, who made his dream of a festival in Stratford come true, Raymond Massey, his wife and his beautiful step-daughter, members of the Producers Theatre group, who were backing the show, and other theatre notables.

The guests were fed well and got out on schedule, but a new and unanticipated problem developed. When about 30 chauffeur-driven Cadillacs wait around for pickups on a cross-town street in New York's rush hour, there is the material for a traffic jam and there was one.

Ambassador and Mrs. A.D.P. Heeney and the party hosts, the last to ride the elevator, passed the queue of eager spectators on the sidewalk and joined the rest of the official party in the loge half-circle just in time to see the curtain rise.

The set got the first round of applause which continued for the actors, but poor Kit Marlowe, after 369 years, came in for continued criticism.

As Walter Kerr said in the Herald Tribune: "As of last evening, one thing was clear, Marlowe was not Shakespeare."

There were a few compliments for the long-dead author: "There is a sullen magnificence in Marlowe's cascading poetry that makes his continued fame as a playwright understandable," Richard Watts wrote in The Post.

This is the way John Chapman of The News saw the evening: "A big, loud melodrama in technicolour and 3-D, on the widest screen in town, had its opening last night at the Winter Garden and provided the greatest Canadian uprising this continent ever saw. It wasn't a movie, either, but the production by the Festival Company of Stratford, Ontario, of Christopher Marlowe's 'Tamburlaine The Great'. Cecil B. De Mille had better hurry and put it on film as his masterpiece before he retires."