

Tremblay, William Fruet, Gratien Gélinas, James Reaney, Françoise Loranger, Marcel Dubé and Michael Cook.

The renaissance began in Montréal in the forties, but national development was slow, and in 1951 a Royal Commission under Vincent Massey, surveying culture in Canada, could report sadly that "professional theatre is moribund" and that the "writing of plays has lagged far behind the other literary arts." The basic reason was clear — play production is the most expensive form of literary expression. Novelists require only publishers; playwrights need theatres, casts, props, costumes, and stage crews. At the time of the Massey Report, Canadian productions in English were usually foreign, old and, except for touring companies, confined to Toronto. But things were stirring.

The Stratford Festival, created in 1953 by Sir Tyrone Guthrie, and some friends with the vigorous support of the town fathers, was the first clear sign of better times ahead. Although its main focus has never been on native bards, its impact on Canada has been enormous. The late Nathan Cohen, one of Canada's most significant critics, noted that "suddenly Canada had a theatre. Suddenly major cities across the country were producing the classic plays . . . with professional companies. Actors were being developed, designers were appearing, and newspapers began hiring full-time theatre critics. . . ."

The second great leap was in 1957 when, as a result of the Massey Report, the Canada Council was established "to foster and promote the study and enjoyment of and the production of works in the arts." In its first year the Council distributed some \$2.6 million to individuals and companies, and it soon produced a spectacular increase in the number of theatres. (In 1973-74, it distributed \$4,572,000 of its annual \$18,258,000 arts budget to theatre projects.)

In time, the rush of theatres produced a rush of playwrights. There had been some good ones, Brian Doherty and Patricia Joudrey for example, but their plays (such as *Father Malachy's Miracle* and *Teach Me How to Cry*) were produced abroad. In November 1967 (Canada's centennial year) George Ryga's *Ecstasy of Rita Joe* was produced at the Vancouver Playhouse. Stratford's short-lived experimental Canadian Place Theatre offered *Occasional Seasoning* by Larry Kardish (who would later write his fine play *Brussels Sprouts*), *The Dance* by Terry Cox, and *Memories for My Brother, Part One* by John Palmer.

Several theatres devoted to Canadian plays opened in Toronto. The Factory Theatre Lab had the first great success in 1971 with *Creeps* by David Freeman. The producer, William Glassco, then moved around the corner and opened the Tarragon with another production of *Creeps*. Later, the play was performed at Washington's Folger Theatre and in New York. The Tarragon, after a series of lesser plays ("all Canadian, all new, all awful," according to critic Don Rubin), returned to triumph with *Leaving Home* by David French and became the informal clearinghouse for new scripts.

Though Toronto is likely to remain the centre of Canada's English-language theatre, as Montréal is of the French, there has also been great activity on new stages in Vancouver, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Calgary, Halifax and Charlottetown.

Canadian theatre has moved from a dead past to a lively present, but its future is more difficult to discern. In this issue of CANADA TODAY/D'AUJOURD'HUI, we will consider some of today's and tomorrow's playwrights and a few of their plays, take a look at the Stratford Festival's recent season and at its new artistic director, and consider some observations on the Royal Winnipeg Ballet by the United States' distinguished lady of the dance, Agnes de Mille.