

# "I dropped my gin glass at Cannes"-Massie

LINDA GILLINGWATER

EDITOR'S NOTE: Paul Massie is currently playing at Neptune theatre. At the request of the Film Society he discussed his previous acting experience in films, his transition to the stage, and the problems involved in each.

GAZETTE: You decided to become an actor at 15; what came next?

MASSIE: I went to the Central School of Drama in England for a year. I was with a small company, the Scottish Children's Theatre for a year; we played through the Highlands, the Hebrides, and down to London. Then I discovered that, as a Canadian, I was eligible for national service. I had two years with the army in Hong Kong, and came out with 2 and 6, after going in with 2 shillings. A friend and myself subsequently made up poetry and prose that we liked, and sold to various boards of education unwillingly which is to say that they were very unwilling to have it. Then we toured around with our record player to various parts of the north of England.

The secretary and producer of Stratford-on-Avon heard one of these recitals, and suggested that I come for a Stratford audition. I was then tested by MGM who were starting a studio in England. I was then under film contract with various companies for nine years. My first film was with a very distinguished director. Working with him I first got a leading part.

At the Cannes festival I was rushed to a very large cocktail party which, after having been there for five minutes, I gathered was for me. This very large woman reporter rushed up to me and asked in very rapid French: "What piece of music do you think best describes your personality? I dropped my glass of gin."

GAZETTE: Do you prefer stage to film acting?

MASSIE: Everyone who genuinely becomes an actor wants to act as such, that is wants to create characters. This is basically the magic of acting. When you are very young you do all this instinctively. You don't really know what this creative process is. You may have enormous talent. You use a lot of yourself. You are young, you have a lot of energy and enthusiasm. You use your looks, youth, what ever it is.

This is fair again for films because they are always looking for new young faces. They get this face, this personality and one of basic requirements of film technique is to do nothing, absolutely nothing. The less facial expression you use, the less emotion you use the better. This is something you learn over a period of time. This is fatal for a talent if somebody really had a talent and is trying to exercise it as an actor. He is constantly being pushed down, pushed into cotton wool.

If you are young and really want to practice you want to keep on acting, and this means acting on a stage wherever that stage is. Dirk

Bogard once described acting as having an affair with the camera. You get to feel this presence; it's a very very real thing this camera which is whirling away in your face. The feeling basically is that you are bringing the camera to you, you're not acting for it. This means that everything that you are creating becomes smaller and smaller and smaller. In the film the creator is the director. He is ultimately responsible for a performance but in a theatre the actor has to carry the brunt.

If you communicate just once that's worth more than twenty years of filming. Once you communicate you can feel it even if it is just one person in the audience that you are speaking to. It is a very thrilling experience.

GAZETTE: Do you pinpoint your own emotions and work outward from yourself to the part or do you approach a character objectively and rely upon technique?

MASSIE: I don't know, I really don't know. I'm trying to find out. Falling in 'Cat on a Hot Tin Roof' and then playing Romeo at the Old Vic and then going back to films meant that I wasn't progressing in either medium because I was totally confused and this confusion became very real to me personally. I became a muddle, just a mess.

A few years later, having done six or seven films I was in a play which was quite simple. There were no acting problems and during this period for the first time I began to feel in control. When I would go on stage at night I was

confident that I could do what this play required, I could make it real.

For that length of time (I was in it for 13 months) you can't play you. Obviously you can't use you for 13 months in the same non-descript part. I was just there as a character and the acting part of my mind was in control. You do it objectively; you've got to or else you'd go mad if you are doing a part which has no real interest for you.

Some instinct said: 'I'm getting nearer to what acting is what I think acting is.' Immediately after this I heard about a new play 'The Rabbit Race.' This was a challenge and I chased it harder than I ever have for anything in my life. I knew it was a sort of crisis time. I approached rehearsals; it was a time for showing off. This was agony for four weeks, absolute agony. When we came to first night I had no idea of what I had achieved. I felt I was nowhere near ready.

I guess I would have to say that acting is a combination of the two, both of method and of technique. You have to experience a part during rehearsal. When you have gone through it, worked it through then technique takes over. If you actually feel real emotion during a performance you are indulging yourself not for the benefit of the audience but for yourself.

GAZETTE: Does the size of the audience affect an actor's performance?

MASSIE: An actor is not going to be in top form every night. This

can't be expected. The size of the house does not affect the performance; you are aware of a very small audience because of the acoustics. You just get a feeling of void. However, it should not affect the performance; it is an actor's job particularly when you are in a theatre that is very young. You know this before you come here. The management might get quite upset at empty houses but it is part of your job as an actor. It is something I have very little patience with complaining about small houses.

GAZETTE: One of the leading roles you've played this past summer is that of Einstein in 'The Physicists.' What does the play mean to you both as an actor and as a piece of theatre?

MASSIE: It is a question I can much more readily answer in about three months time when we stop playing it. While you are in a play it is very difficult to be objective about it. As an actor you approach a play subjectively. You think through what you are acting; it is the director's job to see the overall play and how you fit into it. It is impossible for every actor, and this is something I feel very strongly about, to have an overall picture. If you each had one with a picture and each conflicting the play would be disastrous. You know what your relationship is moment by moment with each character you're playing. You have seen this through.

I can take you through Einstein and tell you what I am thinking in relation to this character. This is

not what the play means however or how it fits in with theatre or with literature. I haven't the vaguest notion of what the message or the meaning of 'The Physicists' is. I know what Einstein means but

GAZETTE: The director was Curt Reis. Didn't he give you an indication of what he hoped to do?

MASSIE: Yes he did give us a talk at the first rehearsals. I honestly can't tell you what that talk was about because it changes so radically through the period of rehearsal as we individually discovered things about our parts. Then we had to fit them together. Through rehearsal it evolved but not terribly much during the performances. Some plays do grow much more than others during performance but this one, strangely enough, didn't. It is a theatrical play, it holds an interest. This is achieved by timing of action on the stage and of lines. These were pretty fairly set during rehearsal. It hasn't changed very much.

The play will change more if it is more loose dramatically, if the interrelationships of the characters aren't so set. During the course of the play you find the holes, the problems you haven't solved and then you go on from that to work on these things, re-thinking and then you find the performance of a play will change quite a bit.

GAZETTE: Is there any type of audience that you particularly enjoy?

MASSIE: Students and children.

The best thing about student audiences is that if they feel something they show it immediately. If they are bored you know about it right away. This is preferable to just sitting there which most of the adult audience does. You wonder: "What's wrong; nothing can get to them."

GAZETTE: What would you suggest for someone who is interested in acting? Is drama school necessary?

MASSIE: There is no must. No one can judge whether or not any other person can act. You must always remember that you can learn from anybody. Humility is not the same as mode modesty however.

GAZETTE: What would you consider the more difficult side of being an actor?

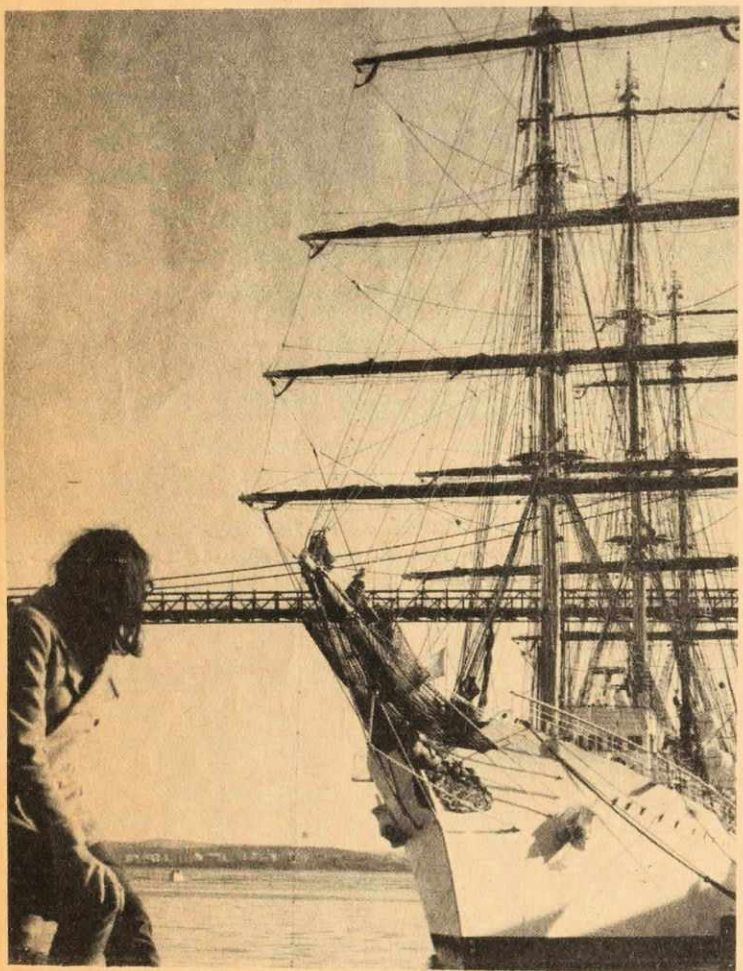
MASSIE: The most difficult thing about acting is trying to retain a basic self confidence which

you must do. The closer that you come to real acting the more vulnerable you become. Another difficulty is that there is just no time to get to know anyone outside the theatre. An instant that you have to fight against is the nesting one. At one time I succumbed and was settled with a family. Whatever else happens I know that I could never again be as unhappy, as I was at that time.

Right now the Neptune season is coming to a close I'm scraping off the moss and getting ready to go. I had a very weak character; hopefully it is becoming stronger day by day. It's not really becoming hard; it's just learning to get in control. Hopefully I am now.

GAZETTE: Would you continue to act if you were restricted to minor roles?

MASSIE: Yes. If you are really an actor you just go on doing it. I am and I will.



ARGENTINE TRAINING SHIP  
La LIBERTAD

## 18 months before the mast

EDITOR'S NOTE:

La Libertad is the largest sailing frigate of its kind in the world. The vessel belongs to the Argentine navy and was docked in the Halifax harbour for five days last month. With masts, spars and rigging lit up at night, and with sails furled as she left the harbour, La Libertad was reminiscent of another era in the history of Halifax.

The captain of La Libertad described her function as that of helping officers and crew to relearn what he termed the "mystique of the sea". He felt that modern seamen are more concerned with power and speed than with winds and tides, and that the sea could be both a friend and an enemy.

The following is an interview of a member of La Libertad's crew by Gazette features writer James McPherson.

JAMES MCPHERSON

During a visit to the Argentine sailing frigate, "La Libertad", we were able to entice ashore a seaman, Conscripto Jose Morello, to have dinner with us. This was largely due to the provision by Ian Ball of Lois Miller (a Dal coed) as suitable manbait.

Jose is twenty-two years old and serving his national service.

He is neat, short dark, a little shy and endowed with the quiet courtesy which seems to come naturally to the Latin American lower middle classes. A courtesy shown in his efforts to understand our fragmentary Spanish. As we drove home he introduced himself as born of Italian parents in Cordoba, one of the principal cities of the Argentine hinterland and showed pictures of his father, an electrician, of his "hermanita," (little sister), and mother. Jose said he had gone to school until he was twelve years old when his father began to train him in the electrical trade. When we met him he had been in the navy eighteen months.

We entertained him in the room of a slightly impoverished student, with an average undersprung and overstuffed studio couch that doubled as a bed at night, and curtains that had been rejected by the Royal Ontario Museum, more by reason of their lack of condition than their lack of years. The dinner table displayed a set of crockery, representing odd gleanings from second-hand shops throughout Halifax. His astonishment at the comparative opulence of the room served to remind us of the very different standards of living in Argentina and Canada and to set the terms of reference for our conversation.

Naturally we asked him what he thought of the navy, and if he liked the service. He had never thought much of the matter but was well aware of the fact that

his wages came to less than a dollar and a half a day in a country whose officers until recently were the world's highest paid. We asked him why Argentina spent more of its national budget on its armed forces than on education. He was not sure. We asked Jose what part the armed forces had played in defending Argentina since the middle of the nineteenth century, when it joined with Brazil and Uruguay in fighting a fifteen year war with Paraguay. He did not know.

Broadening the topic a little we asked what he thought of General Onganía's assumption of power and the consequent opposition both by the students and the union leaders. Did the General represent progress, and security against anarchy or Communist subversion? He did not know much about the "golpe" since it had taken place after "La Libertad" had left Argentina. He thought the trade unions consisted either of corrupt leaders who were colluding with factory owners to cheat the workers or else they were thoroughly irresponsible. As an example he mentioned the management of the railway which are grossly inefficient, overmanned and largely the cause of Argentina's continuing budget deficit. A friend from Chile had once commented on how, when travelling in Argentina, his train had been shunted into a siding and the passengers had been told to wait twenty-four hours until their engine, which was needed elsewhere, could be returned. He finally hitched a truck going in the right direction,

Yet we were asking him the wrong questions about his country for he was very proud of the beauty of the cities, and even if he intended to immigrate to the United States as soon as he returned to Argentina, Jose was in no way ashamed of his country. Many of the questions we had asked him were not the sort that he considered his place to answer or ask — that was for the upper classes to decide. But in talking of his mother, her cooking (an exchange of recipes here), of his "novia," his girlfriend whom he had been courting for seven years, and of his friends on board ship and at home, we learned that he managed to enjoy life in his own way, in the way of his class in Cordoba, and the lower deck in any navy. If he did not know the answers to political questions it was not for lack of intelligence and interest in what was going around him. He was observant and precise in asking us questions about who we were and what we did, in doing so he portrayed a wisdom that consists, as Candide would have agreed, of learning to cultivate one's own garden.

### Dal hosts festival

A voyage into the art, drama, history and music of the Renaissance will highlight a festival to be held at Dalhousie University from Oct 23 to Nov. 5.

The cultural festival, which is open to the public, is sponsored by the departments of art, drama, history and music, and will feature two concerts, a history and music lecture, an art film, an exhibition of Shakespearean costume designs and a four-day presentation of Richard II.

The festival will open on Oct. 23 with music of the Renaissance in two parts. In the afternoon, a performance of songs and dances of the Renaissance will be given by Suzanne Bloch - singer of the lute and player of virginals. In the evening, Miss Bloch will give a lecture-recital on Shakespeare's use of music in his plays.

Prof. Tamara Hareven, of Dalhousie's department of history, will give a lecture entitled 'The Renaissance View of Man, on Oct. 26.

Dalhousie's Sunday Afternoon Concert on Oct. 30 will feature the New York Pro Musica with music of Renaissance Florence.

From Nov. 2 to 5, the Drama Workshop will present Shakespeare's Richard II, and on Nov. 3, an art film on Michelangelo will be shown.

Original costume designs for Richard II and art productions of the Renaissance will be exhibited in the foyer of the Dalhousie Art Gallery from Oct. 24 to Nov. 5.

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## NOTICE

### MEDICAL UNDERGRADUATES

Representatives from the Canadian Forces Regional Surgeon's Office and the Canadian Forces Recruiting Centre, Halifax, will be present in the Lecture Room, of the Public Health Building, Wednesday, 19 October 1966 at 2 p.m.

This will be your opportunity to discuss the details of the Canadian Forces Undergraduate Subsidization Plan.

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