

# Citadel opens season with new director

On September 22 the Citadel will be opening their new season with William Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*. John Neville, the Citadel's new artistic director will direct and make his first appearance in Edmonton as Benedick. He has taken this double chore on only because he is familiar with the play both as actor and director. Also the undertaking represents a shrewd move in the field of economics. In spite of its phenomenal subscription sales, unequaled anywhere in North America, the Citadel is not overendowed with funds. Guest Directors cost money. Appearing with Neville will be Pamela Brook as Beatrice and Roland Hewgill as Don Pedro and Eric Donkin as Don John. All are veterans of the Stratford festival in Ontario. The coveted role of the rustic Dogberry will be played by Douglas Chamberlain recently seen in Charlottetown in *Anne of Green Gables*. There is a fair amount of Edmonton talent in the cast as well. Among them are Karen Austin as Hero and Isabella Foord as Ursula with Judith Mabey, Jim Beck and Orest Kinasewich.

A few weeks ago John Neville consented to an interview with *Gateway*. *Gateway's* reporter did a premiere performance as an interviewer and consequently forgot to press one button on the tape recorder and lost about twenty minutes of conversation in his nervousness. However he did manage to ask a few questions. Neville wasn't giving away too much about his production of *Much Ado About Nothing*, but he promised an interesting evening. The interview revealed some of his feelings as artistic director.

*Gateway: How have the theatre facilities in Canada changed since you toured with the Old Vic in 1956 and 1958?*

Neville: The scene and the facilities have changed enormously. Because when I toured in 1956 and in 1958, you played in two places. You

played in Toronto and Montreal and that was it. That was partly because of the immense distances that had to be covered if you wanted to get there (Vancouver). Generally speaking you played on the East coast. There was no national arts centre in Ottawa. Ottawa was near enough for us to go but there was no place to play. I think that the national arts centre has made a profound difference.

*Gateway: Created a spin-off as it were?*

Neville: I think that the spin-off happens in reciprocity with the Canada Council. The Canada Council are now more aware than ever that things mustn't only be seen to be going on in Toronto. It's got to be happening everywhere. I'm personally and always have been, an anti-capital man an anti-metropolitan man. I chose to spend six years of my life running a theatre in the middle of the industrial midlands in England in a place called Nottingham because I rejected London. And the basis of the policy there was that it had to be top quality. That is to say, good enough for Nottingham and therefore better than for London.

*Gateway: I think that's a splendid motto...*

Neville: It's the one significant similarity that I will have in my philosophy about being at the Citadel.

*Gateway: Why did you choose the Citadel?*

Neville: There were certainly acting offers. It so happened that the Citadel asked me. The job was vacant and they asked me to do it. I took a little while considering it. I didn't jump into it four hours notice. One of the things, and I have to be quite honest about this, that really clinched me to do it, was my admiration for what happens in Citadel-on-Wheels.

*Gateway: Good. I'm glad you've mentioned this. Children's theatre happens to be one of my interests.*

Neville: I think it's important and I think that the job they have done, and the job they are going to do is magnificent. In terms of sheer distance covered, it's probably the largest distance of miles, the greatest distance of any company in this whole country. It's sort of unsung at the moment. I had to show the Canada Council a map for instance and say: "Look, this is where they've been - the Arctic Circle."

*Gateway: You really have to wonder about those bureaucrats.*

Neville: Well, it's not their fault, it's such a big country.

*Gateway: In my own terms I sometimes think of children's theatre as a massive preventative mental health plan.*

Neville: Yes. I would certainly buy that. Looking at it in a cheaper and more vulgar way; they are the future audience. And to look at it in the way of the business I have to make my living in - I like to think that I don't think of it in these terms, but that is the truth - they are the future audience. It strikes right across all class values which is a good thing for the future because as you are aware the theatre has been very largely the province of the middle class and middle-aged.

*Gateway: Would you care to comment on what you think the role of theatre is society is. For two thousand years it has been central to the concerns of society but it has become more distant of late. There has to be some kind of reason that it survives.*

Neville: I think that one comes to this later as an artist. I doubt that when I first came into the theatre my reasons for actually doing it are the same as when I joined. I wanted to be an actor. It was a need, a desire. I didn't

know quite why. And that's when I decided to give up West End stardom, which was what I was actually doing at the time. I came out of a very successful run of a play called *Alfie* in which I had created the role - left it in the middle of the run and went to do this job because of my belief that if the theatre is not an essential vital dynamic part of the community, then it's nothing.

*Gateway: It's just sort of commercial masturbation?*

Neville: Yes. I am happiest when I'm living in a community with a theatre. That is, where the theatre is a very vital and necessary part of that community and I feel that the theatre should serve that community.

*Gateway: I frequently look at the audience for a Shakespeare play and think that they are there not to see the play but to buy two dollars worth of culture but perhaps the important thing is to get them into the theatre in the first place.*

Neville: I think this is the important thing anyway. This is where I pay full tribute to my predecessor, Sean Mulcahy because he did that very thing in the space of seven or eight years. You may approve or disapprove of the content of his program but you cannot deny that he built that audience almost from nothing. I think that he probably wouldn't have opened with Shakespeare and the Pinter back to back, but never the less, I'm able to do it because of what he did and I don't forget that. At least, I hope I'm able to do it.

*Gateway: I was reviewing the program for the season and it seems to be the typical well-balanced season. There's a lot of artistic chauvinism going on in this country today. Is there a lot of pressure to do Canadian plays?*

Neville: Oh, there is undoubtedly a lot of pressure but I would want to do them without the pressure - very much so. There are certain plays that I admire very much which unfortunately I have only come into contact with since I've built the program. I had to build the program in somewhat of a hurry since I was appointed a little late. I think it's a balanced program certainly, but it does lack that certain bit of adventure in terms of going out for a new piece of writing. I would certainly hope that in the future we would be doing that. In two years time when the new theatre is built there will be even less reason for us not to do it because there will be a second stage.

*Gateway: Do you plan an experimental program for the second stage?*

Neville: Well, that's where that kind of work could take place. That's where the climate will be right for it. We don't know what the second stage will look like. It will probably be an empty space and adaptable. That's where the experimental work, as you call it, or new work, can be tried. And that will certainly happen, it has to happen. It's very difficult to put one of those into the existing program of plays on the main stage. We have under three hundred seats and it's very difficult to inject that into the program. We've gone quite far in doing the Pinter, there's never been one on that stage yet. I'm quite ready for the audience to be split down the middle on this.

*Gateway: What do you see as your mandate as artistic director of the Citadel?*

Neville: I see my mandate quite

simply as proving that this theatre is too small for us. In the next two years we're going to have to turn people away, even from Harold Pinter's, *The Care Taker*. That's the aim. The walls have to start bursting and bulging....It seems to me that we want to get several different kinds of audiences coming in. I mean *The Caretaker* audience isn't the audience that's going to come to *The Prisoner of Second Avenue*. I don't see why we shouldn't cater to them all. We've got to cater to them.

*Gateway: It seems to me that in Canada the playwrights are just coming along. We have two or three plays like *The Ecstasy* of Rita Joe and *Colours* in the Dark that have become almost Canadian classics. One gets the feeling that it's going to snowball.*

Neville: I think so, *Leaving Home* is in fact a very successful play. It was on my list to do but then I noticed that theatre in the country was doing it.

*Gateway: There's so little around that everyone who was under the pressure to do a Canadian play grabbed it.*

Neville: *Leaving Home* isn't going to offend anybody. Let's be quite frank about that. It's pretty safe to do. If anybody calls my program safe and they're doing *Leaving Home*, and saying they're doing a new Canadian play, I smile slightly. It's not like doing *Battering Ram* which I would love to do. Perhaps in a year time....It's not my job to drive the audience out. It's not my theatre, I'm only a custodian.

*Gateway: It must be a great responsibility.*

Neville: It is a great responsibility.

*Gateway: Does it weigh heavily on you at times?*

Neville: Yes it does but not in a large sense because I think that I've got enough responsibility not to want to get rid of the audiences already here. What I want to do is get another one in as well. People at Nottingham used to visit and say, "My God, I've never seen so many young people." It was a very large majority of young people. We were doing a two-pronged policy; we'd do classical revivals and accepted plays and we would do a lot of new work. I'd say a third of our work was finding new plays and putting them on. But then I was doing repertoire which means that you can nurse a play. You see if I was doing *Battering Ram* here and I was doing it at the same time as *Much Ado About Nothing*, *How the Other Half Loves* and *Plaza Suite* I could nurse *Battering Ram*. I could schedule it for one performance a week. The audience would want to see that in Edmonton and there are people who would want to see it, and it wouldn't be any extra cost to the theatre because it wouldn't be like having four weeks of *Battering Ram* on with perhaps one tenth of the house full. That's the advantage of repertoire.

*Gateway: Would you like to move towards that kind of a situation?*

Neville: I would, very much.

*Gateway: Do you think you will or is it out of the question?*

Neville: It's out of the question in this building because we have nowhere to store them.

*Gateway: But with the other building...?*

Neville: With the other building I would advise that. But I don't know if my advice would be accepted.

## Theatre Francais

This past weekend le Theatre Francais presented a revival of Moliere's play *Le Malade Imaginaire*. The play was first presented last spring to mark Moliere's anniversary. This second presentation was made possible due to the great popularity of the production. That popularity was justly deserved.

The two lead roles were superbly acted. M. Andre Roy as Argon and Mme. France Levasseur-Ouimet gave performances which were well deserving of professional status. M. Roy gave a becomingly irascible Argon, naive, pompous and ridiculous. His timing and movements were flawlessly in character, as were those of Mme. Levasseur-Ouimet. She gave exuberance to the role of the saucy, impudent maid who runs the household. It was she as much as M. Roy who guided the comedy of the play.

As usual with the roles of lovers, Angelique and Cleante offered little in terms of full characterization. Beline, as wife of Argon fulfilled the role of aristocratic lady, solicitous in word to her husband and solicitous in body to most others. M. Reginald Bigras nearly stole the show as Thomas Diaphoirus, the foppish, fumbling arrangement for Angelique M. Bigras can capture any audience no matter how obscure or minor his role. He is a comedian, not merely an actor.

Perhaps the only part of the play which was not deserving high praise was the spectacle of

the doctors. In itself, the scene is hilarious, but the cast did not impart any extra feeling of comedy.

The theatre of College St. Jean is especially suited to such a play. It provides an intimacy and immediacy which is absent in either Studio Theatre or the Citadel. The addition of 17th century musical interludes is also a delightful touch of the period. It is with pleasure that one looks forward to this season of Theatre Francais. The next production is Marcel Dube's *Zone*, opening October 26.

Maureen Forbes

## Chamber music 1973-1974

The Cleveland Quartet, one of the most gifted and exciting quartets on the international concert scene today, opens this year's Edmonton Chamber Music Society concert season, on Wednesday October 24. The Cleveland Quartet will play Beethoven's Quartet in B flat major, Op. 18, No. 6; Antiphones (1969) by Sergei Slonimsky; and Mendelssohn's Quartet in E flat major, Op. 44, No. 3.

Other concerts in this year's Chamber Music Society series will be the Duo Perret-De Zayas (voice and lutes) on November 28; Edmonton chamber music players on January 9; the University of Alberta String Quartet on February 13; the Richards Woodwind Quintet on March 6; and the Orford String Quartet on April 3. Admission to the Wednesday night concerts is by season membership only and last year's series was

completely sold out. Season tickets are available at SUB and the Department of Music, 3-82, the new Fine Arts Building, at \$5 for full-time students and \$12 for regular memberships.

## Music Notes

Ray Davies has returned to the Kinks. A few weeks ago Davies had announced his retirement from the rock scene.

Rumours have it that April Wine has broken up.

Nice to see the Allman Brothers Band at the top of the U.S. charts with their "Brothers and Sisters" album. A single "Ramblin' Man" is also racing up the charts. It's a shame that Duane Allman and Berry Oakley cannot enjoy the group's final breakthrough.

Don MacLean's fourth album will be called "Playing Favourites" and will include several revived oldies.

Album production figures declined while pre-recorded tapes recorded another increase in the latest report on the Canadian music industry from Statistics Canada. A total of 3.68 million records were produced in June 1973 as compared with 4.25 million for the same month last year. (reprinted from Billboard)

In town: Kris Kristofferson without Rita Coolidge on Oct. 5; B.B. King on Oct. 9; Kenny Rogers and the First Edition on Oct. 25. Helen Reddy's concert cancelled!

Sorry - the new Blood, Sweat and Tears album is, of course, entitled "No Sweat" and not "New Blood"