



Black Comedy Good Theatre

Black Comedy by Peter Sheffer was to be presented by Le Theatre Francais in less than three quarters of an hour, and there I was, supposedly reviewing it. Why less than four days ago, I hadn't even known the place existed. My first mistake had been agreeing to take French 30...

The first thing that hit me was the atmosphere. On top of the usual pleasant soiree atmosphere usually attendant upon these sorts of functions, there was an exhilarating cosmopolitanism created by everybody switching freely from French to English. And all this going on in little old Edmonton. I took my seat. The presence of three young children speaking French as good as mine led me to further contemplations of the theme "Why me?"

On stage, lighting effects were exactly the reverse of those being represented. The action started with the stage dimly lit. At the blackout, the stage was suddenly flooded with light. Whenever anyone struck a match, lit a cigarette lighter or turned on a flashlight, the lights would dim. Timing got very tricky at times when people were lighting matches and getting them blown out almost immediately. This was on the whole very well handled, although there were some lapses.

The play, in addition to being very funny, skillfully uses the unusual situation created by the blackout to reveal the characters and explore their foibles and oddities. There is a paradox central to the play, symbolized by the reverse-lighting. As Jean Dutour said about the play in *France-Soir*, "Darkness illuminates everything."

Although I lay no claims to authoritativeness, I found the acting in the play astonishingly good. Gerard Guenette played the difficult role of Harold colourfully and gave what was likely the most outstanding performance. But the acting was well done all round and no one "stole the show". In the discussion between the actors and the audience afterwards it was pointed out that at times the movements of the characters were too secure for people moving in total darkness, and the impression of groping about blindly could have been put across more strongly. This is the most serious criticism of the acting. I would heartily agree with the consensus of the audience that the performance was basically excellent.

There are five more performances of the play, tomorrow, Saturday and next Tuesday, Friday and Saturday. The time is 8:30, admission is \$1.50 for students, and College Saint Jean is at 8406 91 Street. If you understand French (don't be intimidated by this: reasonable comprehension will do. Just try not to feel too out of it when everybody else laughs at a joke you didn't get), you can pass a very enjoyable soiree at the Theatre. For the quality, it's definitely underattended. There's probably all kinds of you out there just like I was a few days ago who would go to these things if you knew they existed. So now you know.

French Theatre Growing

French theatre has existed in Edmonton since 1911. But there was no continuity. On the average, only one play a year was presented. Seasons of more than one play were extremely rare till a few years ago. As well, most of the plays were comedies.

About eight years ago, Reginald Bigras arrived in Edmonton from Hull, Quebec. He had done amateur theatre and had studied theatrics in some of eastern Canada's schools. His major interests were to complete his studies in education and to organize in Edmonton a group of people that would be interested in amateur theatre. Les Collegiens Comediens first played in a very small room which the Theatre Francais d'Edmonton now uses as its workshop. They staged one or two plays a year.

As the younger people got experience, the idea of the Theatre Francais d'Edmonton, an adult amateur group, was born. Their first production was a Felix LeClerc play, *L'Auberge des Morts Subites*. The following year, another member of that same group, France Levasseur, organized a student drama workshop, Le Rideau Rouge. There were then two groups involved in French theatre in Edmonton. Reginald Bigras' group tried to attract or keep interested people that had experience while Le Rideau Rouge allowed people to become experienced with theatre. They worked like that for one year. The following year Reginald Bigras left and went to teach in Falher, and was travelling back from Falher every second week for rehearsals. At that time Claude Ouimet offered his services and took over the direction of the production for that year. He staged the second production that year all by himself, Reginald Bigras having found it too much trouble and work to

travel all the time. He is presently teaching at the Banff School of Fine Arts.

For the first time in 1968, we find the name Theatre Francais d'Edmonton. It was under the direction of Jean Fortier. In 1969-70, Jean Fortier, who had been studying in Montreal for a year, returned. With Claude Ouimet and France Levasseur, he decided to break up the tradition of the French theatre of two productions a year, and produce only one play, but to see that the Theatre Francais d'Edmonton would have an organization to back it up, rather than just individuals. They spent a lot of time trying to organize a board of administrators, getting people of influence in the city to support the Theatre Francais d'Edmonton, even if only morally, to look after their interests, and to look for grants and money.

That year Claude Ouimet directed *Boeing, Boeing* in collaboration with Jean Fortier who was acting as the artistic director of the group. Jean Fortier was looking after the organization and publicity. *Boeing, Boeing* toured Saint Paul, Bonnyville and Falher.

The federal government gave the Theatre Francais d'Edmonton a grant for the 1970-71 season. This allowed them to hire a full time professional, Julien Forcier, to do nothing but look after the interests of the Theatre Francais d'Edmonton.

Upon his arrival in Edmonton in August, 1970, Julien Forcier's first aim was to organize the company as a professional group. That year there were about 55 people involved with the theatre. Everybody had something to do, either of a technical nature, or interpreting a role, lighting, costumes, sets or selling tickets. This year there are about 60 people in the troupe.

During his first season, five plays were presented. *Le Cadrier* by Jacques Duchemes, a Canadian comedy, was the first play produced and also went on tour to Falher, Saint Paul and Bonnyville. The second play was a social drama, *Une Maison un Jour* by Francoise Loranger, also a Canadian play. The third play was a play for children, *Le Fou d'Agolan* by Jacqueline Martin who is also a Canadian playwright. It was presented during the Christmas season. At that time, they not only decorated the stage, but the whole environment, that is the entry hall and the interior of the theatre which was transformed into the insides of a castle.

After Christmas, a play by Thornton Wilder *Ma P'tite Ville* presented a new form of theatre to the viewing public. They finished the season with a play by Robert Thomas, *Un Ami Inconnu*, a police drama. This was another first for their viewing public and was one of the TFE's great successes.

This year they started with a comedy, *Monsieur Mazure* by Claude Magne. This play went on tour to Falher, Saint Paul, Bonnyville, and North Battleford. They next presented a modern drama *Les Rosenbergs Ne Doivent Pas Mourir*. This was again a new form of theatre and was again well appreciated by the public. They are now playing *Black Comedy* and an avant-garde play by Murray Schisgall, *Fragment*. To finish the season, they will again present a police drama by Robert Thomas, *Huit Femmes*, *Les Oiseaux de Nuits* by Jean Pelerin, and a play by Felix LeClerc, *Le Banc sur la Route*.

There will also be a play for children this year which will be presented towards the end of March, and an experimental play called *Tempo-Dimension* based on dance, body expression, poetry and music.

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with her husband Julien Forcier, the present director of the Theatre Francais d'Edmonton. Upon returning from Europe, she stopped acting for about five years. She only started again upon coming to Edmonton in the summer of 1970.

Besides acting in the Theatre Francais d'Edmonton, she also helps with the administration and sets. Although not having any official responsibility, she is very involved with the technical and administrative work whenever help is needed.

Simone Doucette started acting with Le Rideau Rouge four years ago in her first year of university. During her first year away from home, she played in the SUB theatre and was quite thrilled with the experience.

Ms. Doucette has some misgivings about the experimenting in the various forms of theatre the TFE is doing. She thinks that people would rather come to the plays and laugh than partake of tragedy. "In *Une Maison un Jour*, a tragedy, the people felt the need to laugh, and they laughed at the wrong times." However, she is very pleased with her role in *Black Comedy*. "I like to hear people laugh. I prefer watching tragedies, but I prefer playing in comedies."

Ms. Doucette has a B.A. in French Literature and is at present completing a B.Ed. program at the U of A.



Fifteen minutes before the curtain rises

Claudette Guimond started in theatre because she wanted something to do in her spare time. The first time she got involved, she realized that she had really been missing something. At present, she is involved in the third year of a drama program at the U of A. In her drama courses, she deals with all aspects of theatre -- technical, directing, body movement, and speech.

Rene Aubain is a construction worker who reads, sings and generally enjoys being involved in the theatre. Previous to becoming actively involved, he had been hanging around the theatre for about seven years, just looking.

Born in Edmonton, Roger Girouard first got involved with amateur theatre with the Collegiens Comediens ten years ago. When he got married, he left the theatre because he was too lousy. He came back to it two years ago. Since then he has been in about four plays.

His involvement with amateur theatre started more as something to do. "When your not involved with anyone, you have a tendency, with three kids and 'one' wife, to get tied up. You have to keep involved. Particularly my wife, who is at home all the time." As they got more involved they became more interested in the different aspects of the theatre, acting, making sets, and selling tickets.