



Stephen Thrasher and Denise Delong in harmony
Photo: John Davie

Bon bonjour

By ERIN MURPHY

For the opening play in their 1986/87 season, the Dalhousie Theatre Department offered a well executed production of *Bonjour, La Bonjour*, a complex and disturbing drama by Michel Tremblay.

The central character in the play, and the focus of interest for all of the others, is Serge, Gabriel's first born son, and darling 'baby brother' to his four sisters. At the beginning of the play, we learn that Serge has been away for three months living in Europe.

The attention and interest which is lavished on him at his return is often amusing to observe, as we watch him move from one character to another in a series of scenes which represent a round of welcome home visits to members of his family. As the play develops, however, the audience begins to appreciate the bitter frustration which underlies many of the voices addressing Serge.

Most of the characters seem to be trapped in a sort of hopeless inertia. Unable to overcome the problems and chafing limitations, which have collected round them, they turn to Serge. They use him as a sounding board for their complaints about life, or they implore his help, as though he could be their salvation if only he cared or if only he loved them enough. Serge, searching for his own happiness, has to contend with the demands and jealousies of the others as he moves through the play.

Bonjour, La Bonjour is a highly orchestrated script for voices. Reiterated themes of affection, obligation, and regret are interwoven almost like themes in a piece of music. This style of

script places particular demands on the actors. They must work together in close harmony keeping alert to those shifts which occur when one voice leaves off and another cuts in, without losing any spontaneity or conviction in their characters.

Vincent Welton gave one of the strongest performances in the part of Gabriel. This was a convincing, detailed portrayal of perhaps the most sympathetic part in the play.

The studied elegance of Jennifer Allen's portrayal seemed to diminish the force and self absorbed bitterness of Lucienne's character. However, she seemed stronger in the second half, as did Stephen Thrasher, who had the most demanding role, that of Serge. At first Thrasher seemed younger and less self assured than I would have expected, but as the play went on his presence improved and he moved on to a believable crisis in his perception of himself and his family.

The small area of Studio 1 served this play well. If anything, Dan Olson's set emphasized the feeling of cramped, restricted space. The back flats suggested the drab exterior walls of a Montreal tenement, plastered over with graffiti. A few articles of furniture distributed over different levels of the acting area, served to define the locations of the various scenes.

The script must have presented many technical and artistic challenges to director Kelly Handerek and his cast. To judge by the preview performance, on Tuesday, Oct. 14, they managed to handle the potentially difficult aspects of their task quite well. The cast members turned in good performances, which seemed to grow in strength and harmony as the evening progressed.

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