

The Lion in Winter Reviewed

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Reviewed by Sheelagh Russell

The one question that comes to mind in leaving the Theatre St. Thomas production of James Goldman's "The Lion in Winter" is "Was it the fault of the play or of the players?" Certainly something was wrong.

Goldman's genre of the historical comedy is a dangerous one at best, and, although in the characters of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine there is a great potential to be developed. "The Lion in Winter" comes off as yet another version of conjugal and familial conflict, with neither the pathos of Tennessee Williams nor the tension of Albee's *George and Martha*. The "Battering Bixbys" just does not suit the dignity of the characters. One comes to the conclusion that it has all been said before, and said much better.

And yet, it might have succeeded and the cast did its best to see that it did. It is only fair to say that Henry and his Eleanor would present a challenge to any playwright, and it would be to his credit to capture the acid-sweet nature of the relationship of this remarkable pair, as well as the major and petty intrigues of the court. Any attempt should be applauded, just as Theatre St. Thomas venture deserves a good measure of praise.

For, with what they had, the actors gave a laudable performance. The minor roles were carried with a competence that comes from much practice, while the "loving" couple, Frank Sweezy and Evelyn Russell, worked all that was possible and a good deal that seemed impossible from their parts. The sons were played with just the right measure of dignity and youthfulness, granted, a task just as difficult as the portrayal of their parents, and, although Carmelle Boucher lacked a certain fire and grace, she seemed to rise above those around her.

Mr. Sweezy's Henry, aging yet triumphant, proceeded with perhaps too heavy feet and too little caution, but one was left with the impression that his interpretation was the best, especially next to his vitriolic queen. In all, his work was more than commendable. It was powerful.

Evelyn Russell as Eleanor was the triumph of the evening. Here was the "grande dame" of French and English culture, the spirited vixen with a crown, a role which Miss Russell seemed to delight in, blending just the right amount of aristocratic wit and noble temper. Her strong delivery awed the audience.

The characters seemed to rise above their surroundings and it was certainly necessary



Left to right - Frank Sweezy, Carmelle Boucher, Gordon Tweedie, Michael John Sullivan, Wayne Jennings, Evelyn Russell, Allan Gorham. photo by De Freitas

to do so, for the costumes and stage settings seemed a makeshift affair. The clothing of the court would make one think that the family had seen better times. Here and there was a jewel, a piece of bright and rich fabric, but for the most part the characters would have seemed more at home in the scullery.

The stage design came off somewhat better. To his credit, the designer showed great originality, blending the simple realistic with the surrealist theme of playing card hangings,

but an even greater simplicity could have succeeded more in making more convincing Mr. Goldman's lines, for what the play lacked in feeling it made up for in humour.

Bawdy, ribald, expectant - these words could be used to describe both the play and the audience. The spectators were prepared to be entertained and they were not disappointed, but always there was the feeling that there was something more waiting in the wings, something that could explain this irreverence. However, both

players and audience enjoyed their roles and this went a long way to making the evening a success.

Theatre St. Thomas, in performing "The Lion in Winter", showed, to use a tried and true phrase, great potential, left one feeling that greater things can be expected in the future. They have a talented, dedicated team that only deserves the chance to prove itself in more promising circumstances.

String Quartet Premiere Performance

The official introduction of UNB's musicians in residence String Quartet to the Fredericton public will occur on March 30 in Memorial Hall, beginning at 8:30.

Special invitations to the event have been sent to Premier Richard Hatfield, Lieutenant Governor Wallace Bird and

Fredericton mayor J.W. (Bud) Bird.

The quartet have been warmly received at the few public performances they have made in the Maritimes since their conception in September 1970. An ensemble requires time to become a unified body. In re-

views they have been complimented on the speed in which they have achieved this. "The Pach Quartet sounded as if they had played together for six years instead of for six months," and "the quartet performed as though they had been together for years rather than for just a few short

months."

Three of the four members of the quartet have previously played together in a quartet twenty years ago at music school in Toronto, and perhaps this partially explains the amazing speed in which they have "got it all together".

Then, too, the members of the quartet have all had strenuous musical careers.

Joseph Pach, playing first violin, is a member of the Duo Pach. The Duo Pach have toured Canada and New England many times, and have played in Europe. In 1960 they won the Ninth International Competition for Duos in Munich.

Andrew Benac (second violin) and previously a studio musician for CBC radio and television shows. He had also been a member of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, and the Hart House Orchestra.

James Pataki, viola, came to New Brunswick from the Philharmonia Hungarian in Germany. He has also played in quartets and has played around the world, including China.

Ifan Williams, on cello, is the youngest member of the group, and the only member

who was not acquainted with the others at the formation of group. He came to the quartet from the Atlantic Symphony Orchestra.

Members of the String Quartet are musicians in residence at the University of New Brunswick. Mr. Pach has been at UNB for several years, but Mr. Benac, Mr. Pataki and Mr. Williams are sponsored by a Canada Council Grant. Although the grant is tentatively for a two year period, the quartet hoped to remain together permanently.

The first piece on the evening's program is a string quartet in D Major, Hayden's Opus 64, No. 5 entitled "The Lark". The title is derived from the main melody of the first four movements which seem to soar to the sky like the song of the lark.

Mozart's Quartet K.465 in C Major, known as "The Dissonant" is next on the program. This work has been given the apocryphal title of the "Quartet of false relations" because of the unusual harshness of the harmonies in the prologue.

A Quartet in F Major by Ravel rounds out the program.

Music Contest

The deadline for university, and other post-secondary school musicians wishing to enter the 1971 North American College Music Championships has been extended to April 15.

The college musical contest was held for the first time in 1970 under the sponsorship of the O'Keefe Brewing Company Limited. It not only provides national exposure for post-secondary school student musical talent, but bids well to launch one or more of the groups on an almost instant professional career.

In 1971, the championships are being expanded by the brewery into a country-wide search for talent leading as a first step to the Canadian College Music Championship.

The Canadian winners in each of the folk and pop/rock categories will meet the winners of the Intercollegiate Music Festival, a similar competition held in the USA, for the North American title.

Both Canadian entries in the 1970 contest were selected from tapes submitted by some 800 students from 150 different institutions. The US finalists were chosen at Southern Illinois University. International star José Feliciano shared billing with the college groups at both the US and North American finals.

In Canada in 1971, the preliminary tape screening will select the finalists who will participate in the national finals. The extension of the reg-

istration deadline from February 15 to April 15 should permit a record number of entries from all areas of the country this year.

The two Canadian champions, one in each of the folk and pop/rock categories, will then meet the US champions for the O'Keefe North American awards.

Entries for the 1971 Canadian competitions should be sent by the April 15 deadline, to the North American College Music Championships, P.O. Box 362, Toronto 7, Ontario. The contest is open to any bona fide student at a Canadian university, college or post-secondary school.