

## Canadian Theatre? Part II

Last Tuesday's comments, taken mostly from Louis Destrochers brief presented at the forum, were addressed mostly at the funding of theatre in Canada. This column will attempt to come to grips with two facets of Canadian theatre which came up for discussion at the forum: quantity and quality.

The quantity and quality of Canadian scripts and production of Canadian plays have been going in one direction only in the last few years, they have been improving. There seems to be a general feeling that if our Canadian theatre companies produce enough Canadian work the quality will arrive as a natural process. This is the cream rising to the top theory which has been in circulation for some time.

If Canadian authors are produced they will grow in their craft as any working artist will. It is absolutely necessary that our playwrights are given the benefit of seeing their work transformed and tailored to the demands of the stage. Only then can they see their work come to its intended fruition. Without this production the play-wright is condemned to exist as a literary phenomenon and as any theatrically aware person knows this is only a small part of a play. Plays do not exist until they are seen by an audience. It is in production that they must be judged as suitable for consumption or obscurity.

Still, the problem of quality remains as a deciding factor. As long as the economics of play production remain as precarious as they are the production of untried works remains a precarious gamble unless funding is guaranteed by institutions such as the Canada Council. It is small wonder that theatre companies put their money on Broadway or West End successes. Those who live to please must please to live.

The appeal of the commercial success is obvious. The filtering process of Broadway and the West End ensures that only sure-fire products survive long enough to generate enthusiasm

amongst the general populace. The highly priced and highly valued talents of play doctors and producers are called into play to put an original show on the boards in these centres. The hometown Canadian theatre companies rely on these well tailored products to ensure them of economic survival. It's hard to knock a Neil Simon comedy. It's box office bawdry is a boost in the arm of any lagging financial fortunes. There are worthwhile plays of course that aren't great box office successes. These are usually classified as 'arty.' For these to work their wonders a great outlay of expertise and publicity is necessary unless the company is in an area large enough to support an 'art theatre' much as certain cinema houses feature movies from the art circuit. A case in point is Edmonton's Theatre 3 which has survived out of sheer determination and Canada Council support. Even then, Theatre 3's diet of original Canadian works is supplemented by a profitable Christmas show such as *Alice in Wonderland* or this year's offering, *Wind in the Willows*.

Organizations like the Citadel have to keep the audience coming in if they are to survive and that means they have to give their audience what they want. It's fairly easy to understand that they are uneasy about being pressured to do a season comprised of fifty percent Canadian plays. There just aren't that many good Canadian plays around which means that they would soon be placed in the position of babbling with a greater frequency then they could comfortably handle. A box office bomb can spell disaster for a theatre company.

Where then, are the Canadian writers going to be produced? George Ryga, author of *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, charges that most productions of Canadian plays are going on in attics, warehouses and garages; the secondary and experimental stages in this country. It seems that there is a general reluctance on the part of

artistic directors in this country to back a Canadian work to the hilt, i.e. put it on main stage with all the blessings of opulent productions such as rich costumes and elaborate sets.

If this is true, and it surely is in some ways, why aren't the artistic directors giving Canadian works the full treatment? In Quebec native works are a vital and exciting part of the theatrical diet. Mark Schoenberg and John Neville, artistic directors of Theatre 3 and the Citadel respectively, insist that the first requisite of any play considered for production is quality. In other words, if the play is good enough they'll consider it for production. This is fair enough since there is little point in snowing the public with a lot of poor plays that they don't want to see but Canadians do want to see Canadian plays.

Most Canadian plays generate good box office response once they're proven to be good theatre. These are the plays that we hear about like *Colours in the Darks*, and *Leaving Home*. The others die in filing systems in various offices around the country. Perhaps what this country lacks is a popular Canadian theatre. The plays we see produced are all offered as potential bidders for the title of the great Canadian play and bear the good housekeeping seal of approval of the Canada Council in many cases.

There isn't enough thirst for a Canadian product yet. We won't leave out television sets to see mediocre Canadian work at premium prices and make up our own minds. Most of the theatre in Canada has run the critical gauntlet by the time it makes it to our theatres. Most of the plays we see are second hand triumphs. The productions might not always be of a high caliber but the plays certainly are, be they English, American, French, or Canadian.

Maybe it's too late for a truly Canadian theatre to emerge. The financial burden is prohibitive and it increases with every passing year. It

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## ORACLES

### theatre lives

*Joe Egg* by Peter Nichols and directed by Keith Digby will be Walderdale Playhouse's second production of the year. It will run from November 13 to November 24 inclusive. Its an excellent production. See Review this issue.

*I Do! I Do!* by Tom Jones and Harvey Schmidt is the next production scheduled at the Citadel. This production featuring Roma Hearn and Doug Chamberlain will be directed by John Neville. Choreography will be by Danny Sirretta. This show opens on December 1 but it is possible to take in a preview at cheaper prices on either November 29 or 30. Tickets are \$1.50 for students and \$2.00 for adults. Cast will remain after the performance to discuss the play and production for those who are interested in talking to the actors about the play.

### cheap thrills

*Fat City* directed by John Houston and starring Stacy Keach and Jeff Bridges. Friday, November 23.

*Nicholas and Alexandra* directed by Franklin J. Schaffner with a superb cast running the alphabet from Harry Andrews to Laurence Olivier. Saturday and Sunday, November 24 and 25. Show times are 6:30 and 9:00 p.m. Tickets at the SUB Box Office. Fifty cents in advance or \$1.00 at the door.

### poetry readings

*39 Below*. Five Edmonton poets will be joining John Neville on the Citadel stage to read from an anthology of Edmonton poetry. 12:15 noon, November 21. Admission is \$1.00. For more information see article this edition.

Sid Marty will give a reading at Grant MacEwan Community College on November 28. His latest work is a book of verse entitled *Headwaters*. Room 117 Cromdale Campus, 8020-118 Ave. at 8:00 p.m. No admission charge.

### the eyes have it

The University Art Gallery and Museum is running a Vera Frenkel Retrospective, November 12 to 30. Open weekdays 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Ring House Number One.

The Edmonton art gallery has two interesting exhibits on view:

In the 1740's, the Venetian architect, Giovanni Battista Piranesi had settled in Rome and began his famous series, the VEDUTE di ROMA, view of Rome. He continued to work on these etchings - 135 in all - until his death in 1778. The Vedute are not accurate, architectural reportage, but dramatically exaggerated and intensified visions of antique and Baroque Rome. Even after more than a century of photography, Piranesi's etchings are an unforgettable image of the grandeur of the Eternal City, an image which has haunted the imagination since the 18th century. Til November 29.

The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts closed its doors this April for a two year renovation and expansion program. During these two years, some of the Museum's most important European works of art have been lent of the National Gallery of Canada for circulation across the country. This exhibition consists of 19th and 20th century paintings, primarily by French artists. Among the best known of the paintings are, Henri Matisse's *WOMAN AT A WINDOW*, a 1945 still life by Pablo Picasso, and Paul Cezanne's *ROAD IN PROVENCE*. The exhibition offers a fairly comprehensive view of major developments in painting between the 1850's and the 1940's. The exhibition is supplemented by works of the period from the Stern, MacAulay, Poole and Scrymgeour collections. Til December 9.

### easy on the ears

Chamber Music. A recital in Con Hall is slated for 8:30 p.m. Tuesday, November 20. Albert Krywolt, piano; Broderick Olson, violin; and John Ellis, horn. On the program will be *Sonata for Horn and Piano (1965)* by Violet Archer, professor of music at the University of Alberta. *Sonata for Violin and Piano* by Claude Debussy. *Trio for Piano, Violin and Horn, Opus 40* by Johannes Brahms.

The Edmonton Chamber Music Society will be presenting the Duo Perret-de Zayas in a concert of Renaissance music for lutes and voice November 28 at 8:30 p.m. in Con Hall. Admission by season membership in the Chamber Music Society. Season tickets at Fine Arts 3-82 or at the door before the concert. Special rates of \$5 for the season for full-time students.

The University of Alberta String Quartet will be playing some Debussy in SUB Art Gallery at noon, November 23. That's a Friday. Make a note of it and do yourself a favour.

## SUB ACTIVITIES FOR YOU

### THEATRE

- NOVEMBER 23; "FAT CITY" starring Stacey Keach
- NOVEMBER 24-25; "NICHOLAS and ALEXANDRA" an Academy Award winner in 1972.

shows at 6:30 & 9:00 nightly

### FORUMS

- "THEATRE IN CANADA" forum of November 8 to be aired by CKUA, Tuesday, Nov. 20 at 8:00 pm.
- "LEWIS & NOTLEY" forum of November 13 to be aired on Television North (Ch. 13) on Wednesday, Nov. 21 at 9:30 pm, and the week after on Calgary cable.

### NOW & COMING

- BLOOD DRIVE: Nov. 26-30  
Dec. 3-7  
Room 142, SUB from 10-1 and 3-5
- NOVEMBER 23; 1-2, Jazz in the Theatre Lobby (SUB)
- NOVEMBER 23; 12-1, University String Quartet in the Music Listening Room (SUB)

### RATT

- NOVEMBER 24; Saturday night listen to Jan Randall on the 7th floor of the Students' Union Building.