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MONTREAL'S NATIONAL THEATRE FOR CHILDREN
LES PISSENLITS
A SUCCESS IN USSR AND SWITZERLAND

The Department of External Affairs is pleased to announce that the Montréal-based NATIONAL THEATRE FOR CHILDREN LES PISSENLITS has just completed a successful three-week tour of the USSR, May 28 to June 15, and one week of performances in Switzerland, May 21 to 26. The company was acclaimed by Soviet and Swiss audiences and critics in Geneva, Tbilisi, Moscow and Odessa, the four cities where they performed. The tour of the Soviet Union was part of the programme of exchanges for 1978 and 1979 governed by the 1971 General Exchanges Agreement between Canada and the USSR.

In the USSR, les Pissenlits gave sixteen performances of Gulliver, an adaptation in French of Jonathan Swift's famous story, to sold-out houses and to audiences in which adults outnumbered children four to one. Audience response was so enthusiastic that the company even had to rehearse additional encores. Children and adults eagerly participated through sing-alongs and dialogue because René Lemieux, who played the role of Gulliver, had learned to deliver essential lines in Russian. Official tribute was paid to the company by the Soviet Bureau of the International Association of Theatres for Children and Youth. Also, the Congress of Soviet Theatre Directors, which was meeting in Moscow and attended a performance, expressed its wish to see les Pissenlits return to the USSR.

The Soviet news agency TASS reported that, "Soviet spectators everywhere warmly received the play Gulliver and the art of the Canadian friends aroused a lively interest among children and adult spectators. Very interesting were the acting and the way the play was produced." Soviet television devoted to les Pissenlits a special 15-minute segment of its prime time evening newscast, seen by millions. It included film clips of Gulliver and interviews with the artistic director and members of the cast.

During their three weeks in the USSR, the company met with Soviet actors, technicians and directors and visited children's theatres, museums and music, fine arts and theatre art studios. Jean-Yves Gaudreault, artistic director of the company, said that he was astounded at the instruction available to Soviet children in the performing arts. He went on to describe how the company was presented with drawings of Gulliver by children while visiting the Museum for Children in Tbilisi. "This touched the company deeply. We were overwhelmed at the warmth and friendliness shown to us by everyone everywhere we went."

In Geneva, le Théâtre des Pissenlits opened the International Festival of Children's Theatre. One thousand people jammed into the 400-seat auditorium. The company then gave three other performances for school children. A representative of the District of Geneva Ministry of Education who is responsible for choosing theatre for school children, told les Pissenlits that its production of Gulliver was one of the best children's theatre she had seen.

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