

Players Captivate Fredericton "Hamlet" and "Peer Gynt" demonstrate Ideology of the Canadian Theatre

The Canadian Players, during their short visit to Fredericton last week, successfully demonstrated the essential character of the Canadian Theatre. Their performances of Hamlet and Peer Gynt last Monday and Tuesday typified a theatrical movement which has been of growing importance, a movement started by Guthrie at Stratford and which is being carried on by the two touring groups of The Canadian Players.

The movement typifies the basic essentials of theatre, voice and movement. Gone, at last, are the lavish sets, and dancing girls; in their place we again hear the beauty of the voice and see the devastating effect that motion can have on the imagination. The reasons for this movement can be divined from two distinct theatrical facts. The first, and the most important aesthetically, is the revolt against the polished decadence of the West End and Broadway. The majority of actors at these two centres have tended to become blasé. They are great actors, yet they have lost a great deal of the inherent vitality, which is so essential in a thriving theatrical centre.

The second reason is a purely material one. During eight months the Players will cover about 25,000 miles, throughout North America. All travelling is done by bus, most of their performances are 'one night stands'. The result is that every piece of scenery and costume must be transported with the actors. It need hardly be said that lavish sets and costumes are impractical under such circumstances.

These then are the basic reasons for the return of Canadian Theatre to the essentials of play production.

Many Frederictonians were seeing professional theatre for the first time. A fact which seems shocking if we are to believe that Canada is to prove herself and show her wares, theatrically. The greatest want in Canadian theatre is no longer actors or support, but a place in which to house them.

This was quite obvious during the performances of Hamlet and Peer Gynt, particularly the former. Both productions were staged in an auditorium which can only, at best, be termed poor. The acoustics in the High School auditorium are pitiful, with the result that they make a critic unable to give a fair judgment of the actors' ability.

This was particularly true of Hamlet. Perhaps the greatest cause of complaint was what seemed to be the unnecessary shouting. William Hutt playing Hamlet, was especially guilty of this. In Mr. Hutt's case the poor acoustics can only be offered as an alibi, not as excuse. He often raised his voice to such a high level (and in doing so speeded up the delivery) that much of the poetry was lost. Although poetry is of secondary concern in the production of Shakespeare's plays it is of such grace that an actor is making a great mistake if he does not make use of Shakespeare's poetry. At the same time Bill Hutt was reflecting the ideologies of Canadian theatre in the role. His performance of Hamlet was very different from those of other actors of the last two decades. There was little or no reliance on the experience of Olivier, Richardson or Gielgud. Hamlet was a youth again. Hutt made one feel that Hamlet was a student recently returned from University. The youthful emotions of revenge were fully portrayed. His confidence in Horatio was typical of youth's disability to work out its problems by itself. Yet the emotions were not instilled into the audience to the extent that they might have been. Perhaps the fault lies with the director, perhaps with Hutt; in spite of this his Hamlet was a refreshing interpretation, the element of youth was attractive.

The only failure of the evening was that of Deborah Turnbull as Ophelia. She failed to grasp the delicate naivety of the sane Ophelia and was often incoherent in the third act when Ophelia had lost her wits. Bruce Swerdfager as Polonius often carried innocent buffoonery a little too far, the tireless idiocy of the man became a little tiring during the second act.

Roland Hewgill and David Gardner both played their roles confidently and with a satisfying degree of polish. Mr. Hewgill was particularly impressive as Claudius. He had a certain majesty

Neil Mulvaney Meets

DAVE GARDNER

and talks about "The Contribution of the Canadian Theatre."

Dave Gardner is a young man who became known to Frederictonians as Horatio, the loyal friend of Hamlet in the production shown to a capacity audience in the High School last Monday night. We had the opportunity to interview him for the *Brunswickan* on the following day.

Mr. Gardner is a robust looking, personable young man with blonde hair and a friendly demeanor. He was born in Toronto and attended the University of that city. We soon learned that his talents, far from being confined to the acting medium lent themselves to a large and exciting understanding of the state of Canadian theatre. He pointed out the distinction between the Stratford Festival, which is a coming together of talent for a group of plays on the banks of the Canadian Avon in the summer months, and the Canadian Players, which now consists of two more permanent touring groups which bring high quality drama to Canadians from Halifax to Vancouver.

These two projects, Dave Gardner suggested, had the happy effect of checking the traditional drift of Canadian talent into the United States. Canadian actors were finding that they could not only find appreciation but all of the essential challenges and rewards in our own country.

We asked Dave if there was such a thing as distinctly Canadian drama. He felt that, considering the impact of Stratford, there definitely was such an animal. The character of this drama had partially evolved from a selective choosing of the good elements in both English and American drama, tempered by Canadian environmental and racial factors. Much of this process of selection was carried out by Mr. Tyrone Guthrie, the famous first director of Stratford, a man who Dave Gardner termed "one of the two great men whom I have known". Rather than merely transferring the characteristics of English drama to Canada Mr. Guthrie came with a fresh understanding of its shortcomings and with a legion of exciting new ideas which he found could be realized by molding "the new clay of Canadian talent". He injected into Canadian drama a new spirit and above all a new confidence. In the light of this new found confidence Canadian drama found that it could make apt use of local conditions and racial differences, a fact which was typified in the unprecedented use of

French Canadian actors complete with accent as the French court in Henry V.

Mr. Gardner expressed the opinion that the essential contribution of Canadian theatre through the Stratford Festival and the Canadian Players was a return to the fundamental meaning of the plays. As a result of intense competition the U.S. theatre felt that it must compete on a basis of bigger and more lavish productions, with extravagant use of scenery. Within this context, the audience tended to lose sight of the beauty of the lines and the essential purpose of the play.

Partially as a result of express intention the Canadian players had dispensed with scenery and employed only the simplest costumes. Dave Gardner feels that this allows the audience to concentrate on the lines and through them on the real story that is unfolding itself in the drama. Rather than being a new outgrowth this tendency represented a return to the real meaning of the production, to the original purpose of the play; it was as he said "a return to basics". And this, in the opinion of Dave Gardner was the real and distinctive contribution of Canadian drama to the world of the theatre.

SOAP SALESMAN; SOFT VARIETY

by Neil J. Mulvaney

About a week ago, one of the most energetic salesmen in the Conservative party, Mr. George Hees, spoke to a group of students on the U.N.B. campus. For the benefit of the more than twelve hundred students who did not attend this "good turnout" meeting we can review its effect upon the campus political situation. Undismayed by the "heavy artillery" being rolled against them, some of the Liberals on the campus attended the meeting in a policy of "know thy enemy". From impressions gained from the meeting one

(Continued on page 4)

Your editor overheard this snippet of conversation at the reception. Debra Cass was telling of some lady who approached her after a performance and asked, "But why don't you take this up as a profession".

Letter to the Editor

(Continued from Page 2)
make a serious contribution to democratic development.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,
JAMES PICKETT
Executive Secretary

Where there's drama...
there's

FULL-FASHIONED

Kitten



Wherever lovely women gather... wherever exciting things happen... you'll find the fabulous KITTEN—fashion-leading for fall in new full-fashioned super 70's fine Botany, new dressmaker creations, new full-fashioned collars, new Pettal Orions, new hi-bulk heavy-knits, and ever popular lambswool. Colours and range of new styles utterly breathtaking! At good shops everywhere.

\$6.95 - \$8.95

Jewelled and braided extra

Look for the name "Kitten"

NEILL'S SPORTING GOODS STORE

- FOR THE BEST
- IN SPORTSWEAR
- AND SPORTING GOODS

C.C.M. SKATES — VIYELLA AND HUDSON'S BAY LEISURE WEAR HARRIS TWEED SPORT JACKETS