

**Studio
Productions**

The Man of Destiny by Shaw
A Phoenix Too Frequent by Fry



MONTREAL REPERTORY THEATRE

1550 GUY STREET

April 25-26-27-28, 1951

Sir George Williams College and Schools of the Montreal Y.M.C.A.

INFORMATION FROM THE REGISTRAR

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THE MAN OF DESTINY

By Bernard Shaw

Directed by Janet Campbell.

Setting by Hans Berends

* * *

THE CAST

Napoleon	Gordon Diver
Giuseppe	Paul Colbert
Lieutenant	Bruce Woodall
Strange Lady	Michelle Tisseyre

The Twelfth of May, 1796, near Lodi, Italy; late afternoon.

★

A PHOENIX TOO FREQUENT

By Christopher Fry

Directed by Douglass Burns Clarke.

Setting by Hans Berends

* * *

THE CAST

Doto	Sylvia Read
Dynameme	Kay Ryan
Tegeus-Chromis	Richard Easton

The Tomb of Virilius, near Ephesus; night.

* * *

The Man of Destiny is produced by special arrangement with the Theatre Guild of New York and Samuel French (Canada) Limited; *A Phoenix Too Frequent* with Dramatists Play Service, New York.

Mde. Tisseyre's coiffure: courtesy of Guillaume, Salon Vogue, Mountain Street. Properties for "The Man of Destiny": courtesy of John Russell Antique Shop, Sherbrooke Street West.

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THE PRODUCTION

MRT's Studio is presenting, for its final production this season, an evening of two long one-act plays. One is a dashing excursion into the fresh and fascinating Christopher Fry, the other, a frolic with the bearded veteran of the English stage, George Bernard Shaw.

Christopher Fry's *A Phoenix too Frequent*, performed at the Mercury Theatre and the Arts Theatre, London, in 1946, was the play which first caused its author's name to be

known and discussed by a wide circle of English theatre-goers. It is an exercise of wit, of fun, of dialogue shining as crisply as crystal.

Fry based his play on Petronius' tale of an Ephesian widow who resolved to die, with her determinedly faithful maid, at the tomb of her husband. She is interrupted by a young soldier, whose vitality so floods her mind and body with an urge to live that her intention becomes confused.

Fry has taken this story and tossed it lightly and brightly between his cast of characters: three in all. They exchange views and voice opinions and vie with each other in a rush of melodious imagery until nature's powerful magnet draws the young soldier and the young widow together. Her desire for death and reunion with her husband in a nether world grows limp as her longing to love and to live grow stronger each time she looks into the soldier's eyes. The soldier, who has been feeling the world to be a poor sort of place, vain and empty, sees in a widow who will die for an ideal of perfect love something so inspiring and so fresh that the earth about him suddenly becomes a precious place. They love, they kiss, and then, with sly humour, Fry flips their situations into reverse.

The soldier, who has neglected his duty in the passion of the moment, finds that he is the one who must face death. While he has so busily been meeting his destiny and revelling in it, one of six corpses which he is supposedly guarding, is stolen. He realizes he must face a court martial and a hanging unless he kills himself. It is then the widow who pleads with him to live—to live and to love.

A Phoenix too Frequent is not so lyrical as Fry's now famous *The Lady's not for Burning*, but both plays are fun—fun to read,

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to play, to direct, and to participate in as audience.

Putting the matter in the words of Time magazine: "Whatever Fry's faults—and his exuberance bursts with faults, as with virtues—he has put both arms under poetry and bounced her back on the stage. And the poetry he so manhandles is not a girl with short-cropped hair and horn-rimmed glasses, but a lively queen who can dance, weep and love, and values nothing so much as a warm heart and a glad eye".

Christopher Fry himself has a warm heart and a glad eye. He laughs as he writes and seems to enjoy both hugely.

"Comedy is an escape", he has written, "not from truth but from despair: a narrow escape into faith. It believes in a universal cause for delight, even though knowledge of the cause is always twiched away from under us. . . In tragedy every moment is

eternity; in comedy eternity is a moment."

Shaw's farce-comedy, *Man of Destiny* followed soon after *Candida*, and few two plays could form a sharper contrast.

Napoleon, as Shaw shows him, is a superman with a distinctly Shavian leer. At the time of the play, Napoleon is a young man in his late twenties, "imaginative without illusions, and creative without religion, loyalty, patriotism or any of the common ideals". He is a disillusioned realist who understands the illusions of idealists sufficiently well to play upon them with consummate skill when it suits his purpose. He is a man of destiny because he faces the facts of his life, and is supremely, magnificently selfish in shaping every event to further his own ends.

The sample Show gives us of this colossus is a trivial event which might have happened. The play is no more than a clever farce, almost buffoonery, a picture of a young soldier chasing a young girl and both enjoying the romp.

Shaw wrote this play for Ellen Terry, and sent it to her for her opinion. When she read it, she was enchanted, and urged Sir Henry Irving to produce it. She was totally enthralled by the idea of playing the Strange Lady. Sir Henry, who was incapable of judging the literary and dramatic merits of the play due to his jealousy and antagonism towards its author, at first refused, and then evaded. Yes, he would certainly produce it this year, he promised, and then presented *Madame San-Gêne*, also a play concerning Napoleon.

Eventually, Ellen Terry was persuaded to leave Sir Henry and his melodramas; eventually *The Man of Destiny* reached the stage and played to chuckling and appreciative audiences.

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