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The Theater in French Canada

(1936-1966)

by Jean Hamelin

Department of Cultural Affairs
Québec, 1968



The Theatre
in French Canada

(1936-1966)

*Series on the Arts, Humanities, and Sciences
in French Canada*

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From Les Compagnons to the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde

YEARS OF APPRENTICESHIP

During the last quarter century, the most widely acknowledged advances in French-Canadian cultural life have certainly taken place in the theatre, in poetry and in painting. This does not by any means constitute a claim that an autonomous and original dramatic art has emerged here during this period, or even that the creative effort of French-Canadian playwrights has equalled that of poets and painters. Only within the past twenty-five years, however, has the theatre in Quebec acquired the means which could foster the growth of an indigenous dramatic art. They are easily stated : professional companies truly competent to fulfil their responsibilities and welcome the first efforts of native playwrights and, as essential concomitants, directors, actors, stage and costume designers, technicians — in short, the whole theatrical apparatus now at the disposal of what few dramatists French Canada already has. Clearly, therefore, the spectacular progress made by the theatre in Quebec during this quarter century has been a prime factor in establishing the position of today's Canadian theatre, which nowhere else displays such striking vitality.

Inevitably, this movement crystallized in Montreal. With its population of a million and a half plus the basic cultural institutions it had created for itself, Montreal was in a position to encourage and then practically to monopolize the revival of an art which, before the war, was not only at a standstill but gave

little sign of any will to assert itself against the temporary dominance of movies and radio coupled with a persistent economic depression. Starting from scratch, the movement has since gained momentum so fast that today Canada's metropolis boasts four professional companies presenting regular seasons, a summer theatre open from May to November and two very active amateur groups whose standards are unfailingly high.

In Montreal, where prior to 1940 there was practically nothing save an occasional, haphazard production, about thirty-five plays are now staged in French annually, making it the most active performing centre of French theatre in the world after Paris and Brussels and second only to New York as a drama centre in North America.

All this was not done in a day. A few producers, companies and individual actors were so persistent in their efforts and worked with such unwavering dedication that in the end they achieved results which were sometimes astounding since before the war, Canada had no company of professional standing, whether French or English, no repertory available for continuous performance. French classical theatre was left to the tender mercies of prize-day performances at the end of the academic year, and foreign theatre was almost entirely unknown. Only popular light comedy of the type known in Paris as *théâtre de boulevard* could make any claim to acceptance, and it was of dubious quality, played with equally dubious skill by actors who earned their living primarily in radio.

The Reverend Émile Legault, a Holy Cross father, is now generally regarded as the real pioneer of the theatrical renaissance. It was he who took advantage of the situation and started a theatre in French Canada along lines which continue to this day, being now only normal extensions of those he first laid down. Trained in the school of Henri Ghéon and inspired by Jacques Copeau, Father Legault soon discovered the root of the trouble and found remedies to correct a situation which had reached a dead end. This is why he decided on direct action, founding his

own amateur group, Les Compagnons de Saint-Laurent, in 1938, building around these players a repertory of high merit, with power to interest the youthful and enthusiastic public he wanted above all to reach, and rescuing the theatre from shop-worn, conventional trumpery so that it might go in open-hearted search of poetry and dreams, of stylized expression and rediscovered play. During almost fifteen years (1938-1952), his company set the pace for the theatrical revival in Canada; at the beginning, it recruited its members among amateurs and college students to whom Father Legault succeeded in communicating a love of dramatic art as it was being practised in France at the Cartel theatres directed by Jouvet, Pitoëff, Dullin and Baty. At first he limited himself to Christian drama—Ghéon, Chancerel and Brochet—but Father Legault soon became aware of how confining such a restriction must be. He gave further proof of characteristic courage by promptly moving on into secular drama, and not in any trifling way, for he went straight to the heart of the matter, Molière and Racine, staging performances of *Le Misanthrope*, *Les Femmes savantes* and *Athalie*, which, however unsatisfactory they may have been as dramatic achievements, certainly were true indications of a new spirit. This return to the classics—in those days a striking novelty—was accomplished by simplified stage settings, by abandoning outright the whole baggage of conventions and tricks inherited from the decadent days of overriding realism, by attractively stylized scenery and costumes, designed and produced in the company's own workshop, and by a simple and natural style of delivery.



Father Émile Legault

In 1942, Les Compagnons settled down in the Ermitage, an 800-seat theatre, where they proceeded to build up a loyal following of several thousands, expanded their activities and improved the quality of their productions, some of which, such as *Les Fourberies de Scapin*, *Le Barbier de Séville* and the Cocteau double-bill of *Orphée* and *Œdipe-Roi*, soon placed the group on a highly competent, semi-professional level. The director's efforts were already bearing fruit in more clear-cut productions, costumes and scenery reveled in being picturesque and colourful, staging showed inventiveness and a poetic feeling for movement. From then on, teamwork, since it was dynamic and gave pleasure, was Les Compagnons' great asset. Despite this, three young actors acquired the capacity to stand out from the rest and later became leaders—as they continue to be—in the Montreal theatre world: Jean Gascon and Jean-Louis Roux, founders of the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde, and Georges Groulx.

The Compagnons were now under full sail and, for lack of rivals, monopolized attention. At the Gesù, where they settled for three years in 1945, their acting ability bloomed, their repertory expanded the better to serve modern drama and their public grew to between six and eight thousand people. The French classics were their mainstay, but along with *Le Jeu de l'amour et du hazard*, *Le Médecin malgré lui*, *Les Précieuses ridicules*, *Andromaque* and *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, which showed their preference for Molière and almost established a tradition in French Canada, the Compagnons also developed a repertory of modern or contemporary works like Anouilh's *Le Bal des voleurs*, *Léocadia* and *Antigone*, André Obey's *Noé* and *Viol de Lucrèce* as well as minor works by Rostand, Lôrca and Giraudoux.

Meanwhile, a rival group mainly composed of radio actors had gathered around a talented young director, Pierre Dagenais. The realism their productions borrowed from the American stage contrasted sharply with the theatrical idiom favoured by Les Compagnons. The Équipe held its own for five seasons (1943-48) with a repertory that ranged from Shakespeare's *Songes d'une nuit*

d'été (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), given outdoors on the Ermitage grounds, to Pagnol's *Marius* and *Fanny*, Giraudoux's *Tessa* (an adaptation of Margaret Kennedy's *Constant Nymph*), Salacrou's *Les Fiancés du Havre* and Cocteau's *Les Parents terribles*. Faced with insurmountable financial difficulties, the Equipe disbanded, but was soon replaced by the Rideau Vert, founded by Yvette Brind'Amour in 1948, which remained the Compagnons' only competitor until 1951.

Les Compagnons moved into their own theatre—to which they gave their name—at the heart of a French-Canadian section in Montreal. There they performed for four years before disbanding in 1952. Regular programmes were offered and the theatre became a guiding light and cultural centre which played its part in moulding a new French-Canadian intellectual élite.

With this move, Father Legault had to reorganize his group and change its repertory, venturing successfully into American drama with Tennessee Williams' *La Ménagerie de verre* (*The Glass Menagerie*) and Thornton Wilder's *Notre petite ville* (*Our Town*). But he did not neglect the classics, for he also presented *Britannicus* and *Le Malade imaginaire*, in which Guy Hoffmann, one of the best actors on the Montreal stage today, first revealed his comic talent. European drama was also seriously explored with such carefully selected plays as T.S. Eliot's *Meurtre dans la cathédrale* (*Murder in the Cathedral*), Shakespeare's *Roméo et Juliette*, Goldoni's *La Locandiera* and Pirandello's *Henri IV*, which remains one of the best productions in the history of the French-Canadian theatre. In 1952, the poet Pierre Emmanuel entrusted Les Compagnons with the initial production of his drama *L'Honneur de Dieu*.

By the time Les Compagnons disbanded, they had created a significant heritage for the Canadian theatre: the French classics, especially Molière and Racine, had been revived; several major examples of foreign drama had been staged and the way had been paved for acceptance of modern and even contemporary plays. The Compagnons created a new public, as large as 15,000 at particularly successful plays, thus helping to assure the success

of the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde which took up where the Compagnons left off and was run by several of their former members. Engaged as they were in a constant struggle for survival, the Compagnons did almost nothing for native authors. They attempted only one Canadian play, *Maluron* (1947), by the ballader Félix Leclerc. Yet this was the time when the native Canadian drama began to take shape. In Montreal before the war, Yvette Mercier-Gouin had each year written and produced bourgeois comedies strongly influenced by the French *théâtre de boulevard*. But since her plays were not published, they had no lasting influence.

During this period a few locally-written plays were staged: *La Fille du soleil* (1946), a fairy-tale comedy by Carl Dubuc, and *Le Temps de vivre* (1947), a Sartre-like drama by Pierre Dagenais. Gratien Gélinas' *Tit-Coq* (1948) overshadowed all other contemporary works and dominated the Canadian stage for several years, with 200 French-language performances in Montreal alone at a time when a good play rarely survived fifteen. The extraordinary success of this dramatic comedy may be explained by its popular style with dialogue that captures the speech of the French-Canadian working class and satire that was easily understood by the audience.

Strangely enough, *Tit-Coq* was not imitated, nor did it serve as a model for Canadian works immediately subsequent to it, which were perhaps more literary than dramatic: *Un Fils à tuer* (1949) by Eloi de Grandmont, where the action takes place during the French régime and raises the problem of belonging to a new country; *Le Marcheur* (1950), a peasant drama by the novelist Yves Thériault; *Polichinelle* (1950), a verse fantasy by Lomer Gouin and *Rose Latulippe* (1951), a romantic comedy by the actor Jean-Louis Roux. Around this time, the writer Paul Toupin made his theatre début with *Le Choix* (1951), but it was *Brutus* (1952) that revealed his genuine dramatic skill. Although the influence of de Montherlant is detectable, this play about friendship, with its beauty and purity of language and its forceful, effective construction, remains one of the most notable achievements in French-Canadian drama.



Brutus by Paul Toupin, produced in 1952 and revived at the Comédie-Canadienne in 1960 with Gilles Pelletier and Lionel Villeneuve

When Les Compagnons disbanded and L'Équipe failed to survive, there remained only the Rideau Vert. This group specialized in *théâtre de boulevard* comedy but its repertory was eclectic enough to include Lillian Hellman's *Les Innocentes* (*The Children's Hour*), with which the play began its career, and Giraudoux's *Ondine*. However, the company favoured such playwrights as Roger-Ferdinand, Marcelle Maurette, Jacques Deval and Michel Duran. The Rideau Vert at that time did not attract large audiences and its influence remained small so that in 1952 it suspended activities for three seasons.

Another short-lived group, the Compagnie du Masque, founded by Fernand Doré and Charlotte Boisjoli, tried to recapture the enthusiasm and vitality of which the stage is capable by presenting a few medieval farces and some Molière plays. But its finest production was certainly Cocteau's *Antigone* (1950).

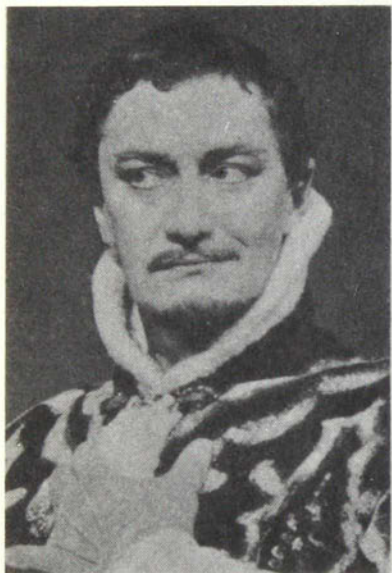
The Companies

LE THÉÂTRE DU NOUVEAU MONDE

The confusion and uncertainty that beset the theatre in Montreal during the post-war years continued until the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde was founded in 1951. Since, always for financial reasons, the other companies had been forced to disband or were on the verge of doing so, the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde had the good fortune to be able to enlist under its banner many of the day's best actors, most of whom had been trained by Les Compagnons and then had gone to France for extensive periods of work or study.

In fact, the new company was the first of professional calibre to win the esteem of the Montreal public. It maintained a production level of unquestionable theatrical excellence that soon became the standard expected in the Montreal theatre, a standard nearly always maintained ever since. The Théâtre du Nouveau Monde was founded by Jean Gascon—who is still (1966) its director—Jean-Louis Roux, Guy Hoffmann and Georges Groulx who were soon joined by Robert Prévost as set designer. Following the tradition established by Les Compagnons, it gave precedence to French theatre, the classics, however, being represented almost exclusively by Molière. Side-stepping tragedy—neither Racine nor Corneille has ever been played at the TNM—Molière became the company's favourite dramatist. Significantly, its first production was *L'Avare*, and this play was revived in the autumn of 1963. *Tartuffe* followed in 1952, *Don Juan* in 1953, the three one-act farces in 1955; these were later presented at the Théâtre des Nations in Paris and during the following year when the group first appeared at the Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Ontario. The Molière tradition continued with *Le*

Malade imaginaire (1957), which achieved a record of ninety-four performances, *Les Femmes savantes* (1960), the double bill of *Georges Dandin* and *Le Médecin malgré lui* (1963), both



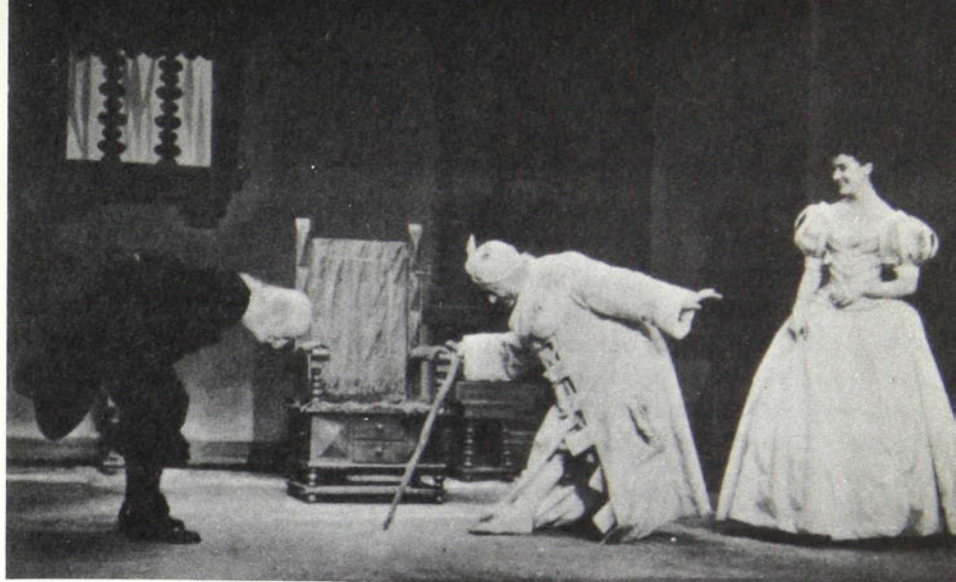
Jean Gascon in *Richard II* at the
Théâtre du Nouveau Monde

plays being given a Canadian setting, towards the end of the French régime, and *L'Ecole des femmes* (1965), which was played in London at the first Commonwealth Festival. Mari-vaux's *La Double Inconstance*, performed in 1962, was the only other French classical play offered by the TNM.

French theatre has indeed been the mainstay of the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde over the years. The most frequently and effectively presented authors include Claudel with *L'Echange* (1956), one of the finest productions in Montreal's theatre history, and *Le Pain dur* (1963); Labiche with *Célimare le Bien-Aimé* (1952) and *Un Chapeau de paille d'Italie* (1957); Albert Husson with *La Cuisine des anges* (1953), de Montherlant with *Le Maître de Santiago*

(1955); Alexandre Rivemale with *Azouk* (1955) and *Nemo* (1956), the latter produced in Montreal before it appeared in Paris; Sacha Guitry with *Mon Père avait raison* (1958); Armand Salacrou with *Histoire de rire* (1960); Georges Feydeau with *Le Dindon* (1960), which had nearly eighty performances in Montreal alone; Alexandre Breffort with the musical comedy *Irma la douce* (1953) and Musset with *Lorenzaccio* (1965).

Yet foreign plays have also had notable productions, among them Jan de Hartog's *Maître après Dieu* (1952); Chekov's *La Mouette* in 1955; an adaptation of Thomas Otway's *Venise sauvée* (*Venice Preserved*) in 1958; Brecht's *L'Opéra de quat'sous* in 1961, marking the company's tenth anniversary; Shake-



Molière's *Le Malade imaginaire* was a triumph at the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde with Jean-Pierre Masson, Guy Hoffmann and Diane Giguère



Guy Hoffmann as the judge in Alexandre Breffort's musical comedy *Irma la douce* at the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde

speare's *Richard II* (1962), staged for the Montreal Festival and later included in the regular repertory at the Orpheum; Sean O'Casey's *L'Ombre d'un franc-tireur* (*The Shadow of a Gunman*) in 1963; Strindberg's *La Danse de mort* in 1964 and Brecht's *Mère Courage* (1966).

In 1954, the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde billed Canadian authors for the first time, giving in the same evening a farce by Eloi de Grandmont, *La Fontaine de Paris*, and a drama by the novelist André Langevin, *Une Nuit d'amour*. *Le Temps des lilas*, a dramatic comedy by Marcel Dubé, the Canadian playwright who has most assiduously courted the favour of Montreal audiences, was performed some fifty times in that city (1958), was presented at the Théâtre des Nations in Paris (when the TNM participated for the second time in this festival), at the Théâtre Royal du Parc in Brussels and, in an English version, later toured all major Canadian cities.

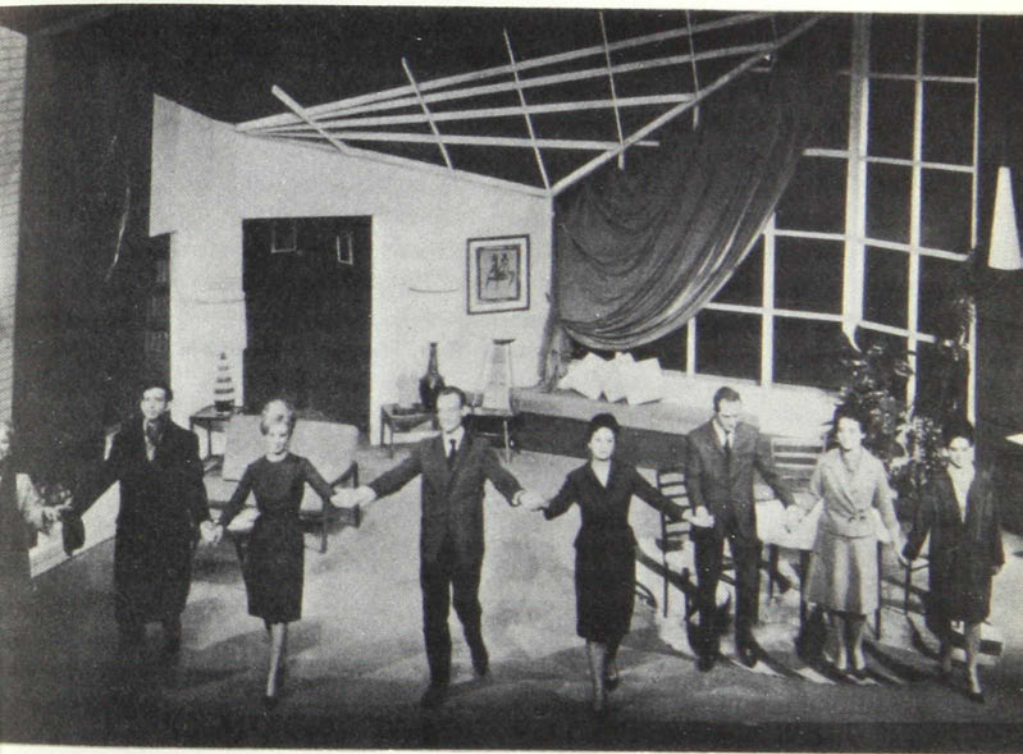
In 1957, the TNM established a competition—subsidized by the Quebec Department of Cultural Affairs—for original works by Canadian playwrights. It was to produce interesting results. The first winner, also by André Langevin, was a satirical comedy on Montreal politics, *L'Oeil du peuple*. Two other prize plays, *Les Taupes* by François Moreau (1959) and *Deux Femmes terribles* by André Laurendeau (1961), were *succès d'estime*. This competition has since been dropped.

For its regularly sustained effort, the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde is the dean of Canadian companies. It has not deviated from its objectives since its foundation. As its operational framework has hardly altered, the TNM has had the rare advantages of stability, unified direction for its activities and sustained quality in its productions. Yet it has remained sufficiently flexible to make use of the talents of a very wide range of Montreal actors.

Until 1957, the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde's home was the 800-seat Théâtre du Gesù, which after its departure has been little used. Most of the company's performances since then have been given in the Orpheum, a former cinema house with about 1,000 seats.

In 1955, the group acquired its own workshop for rehearsals, building and storing scenery as well as making costumes. Here also are the TNM's administrative offices.

The average attendance at Théâtre du Nouveau Monde productions in Montreal is around 25,000 but there are great individual variations. For example, Ghelderode's *Pantagleize* drew only 3,300 spectators and the *Choephor*i from Aeschylus' *Oresteia*



Deux Femmes terribles by André Laurendeau. The 1961 Théâtre du Nouveau Monde production was directed by Jean-Louis Roux, with sets by Jac Pell

3,600. By contrast, attendance at *L'Opéra de quat'sous* exceeded 35,000, at *Les Femmes savantes* 37,000 and *Le Malade imaginaire* 45,000. *Le Dindon*, produced during the 1960-61 season,

was the greatest box-office success in the company's history with an attendance of 55,000. Each season, the TNM averages 120 to 130 performances. It is estimated that in its first fifteen years of existence, more than 1,700 performances were given to nearly a million spectators.

Jean Gascon, the company's director, has produced most of its plays, responsibility for the rest having been assigned to Jean-Louis Roux, Guy Hoffmann and Georges Groulx.

LE THÉÂTRE-CLUB

The Théâtre du Nouveau Monde had been the only performing company for two seasons when the Théâtre-Club was founded at the end of 1953 by former Compagnon Jacques Létourneau and actress Monique Lepage. The group made its début a few months later with *Beau sang*, a play by Jules Roy, which clearly indicated the company's aspiration to achieve eminence in the Montreal theatre world. Unable to find permanent quarters, the Théâtre-Club was obliged to be continually on the move, yet, in spite of this, it attracted the attention of both critics and public with works like Henri Troyat's *Sébastien* and J.B. Priestley's *Virage dangereux* (*Dangerous Corner*) which were performed in a high school auditorium.

Under a French director, Jan Doat, then head of the Quebec Conservatory of Music and Dramatic Art, the company presented Musset's *Le Chandelier* (1955) and Shakespeare's *La Nuit des rois* (*Twelfth Night*) in 1956, which was its first big commercial success with 25,000 spectators. Between these two productions, the Théâtre-Club staged a Canadian play, *Le Barrage* by Marcel Dubé, and made a bold but short-lived venture into popular theatre with Alexandre Dumas' *Les trois Mousquetaires* and, later on, Pagnol's *Topaze*. A second Canadian play, *Quand la moisson sera courbée* by Roger Sinclair, was presented at the Dominion Drama Festival. With Kataïev's *La Quadrature du cercle*, another landmark in the Théâtre-Club's collaboration with Jan Doat, the company settled down for three seasons (1957-60) in a small 200-seat theatre.

Jacques Létourneau proved his talents as a sensitive and intelligent director with the production of Audiberti's *Le Mal court*—another great success—and de Montherlant's *Celles qu'on prend dans ses bras*. After 1960, the Théâtre-Club played at the Comédie-Canadienne, its varied activity distinguished by concentration on modern and contemporary drama. Racine's *Les Plaideurs*, directed by Jan Doat, was followed by Anna Bonacci's *L'Heure éblouissante*, brilliantly produced by Jacques Létourneau; Camus' *Caligula*, staged and acted by Robert Gadouas, and *Requiem pour une nonne* (originally written by William Faulkner and adapted for the stage by Albert Camus), presented with great economy of means by Louis-Georges Carrier. The Théâtre-Club has also devoted attention to the French classics, occasionally staging them for student audiences; besides *Les Plaideurs*, they gave matinées of Corneille's *Cinna* and *Le Menteur* and, in 1963, Lesage's *Turcaret* which was first presented at the Montreal Festivals. *Le Menteur*, directed by Florent Forget, was a particularly fine example of classical drama produced for students. Among French professional companies only the Théâtre-Club produced plays for children.

Most of the Théâtre-Club's twenty-five productions were directed by Jacques Létourneau, though Jan Doat was responsible for a few of them. In addition, the company indirectly supported other efforts, notably two modest productions of one-act plays by the Canadian playwright Jacques Ferron, which were directed by Marcel Sabourin, and Jacques Languirand's comedy *Les Violons de l'automne*.



Jacques Létourneau



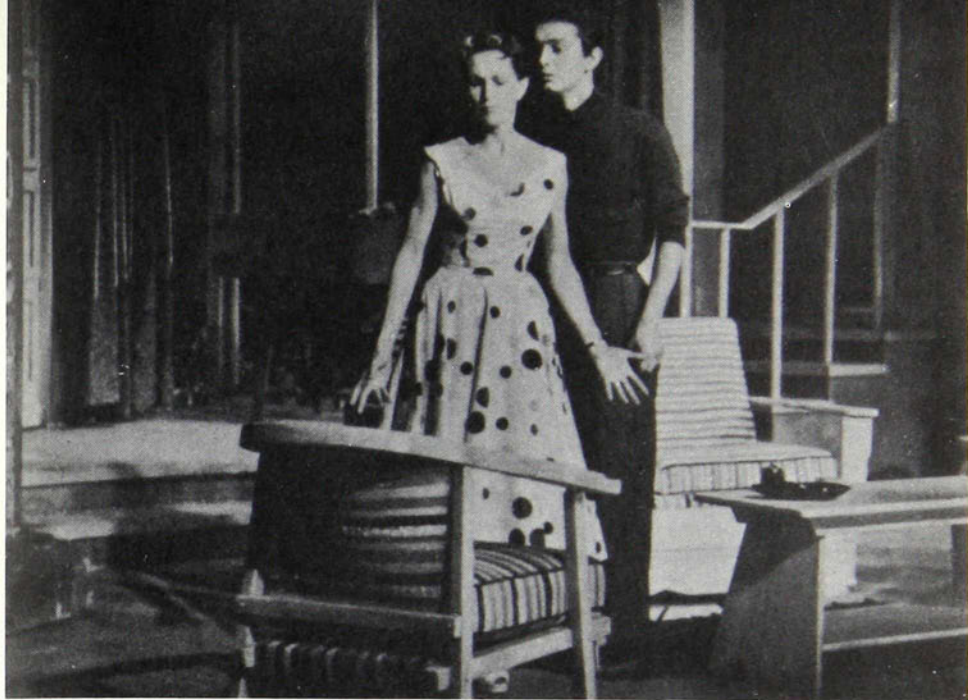
Monique Lepage
Founders of the Théâtre-Club

Despite financial difficulties which finally forced the Théâtre-Club to disband in 1964, it always maintained high standards, evident in such plays as the spectacular version of Shakespeare's *Le Marchand de Venise* (*The Merchant of Venice*) directed by Jacques Létourneau in 1963 to mark the company's tenth anniversary.



Racine's *Les Plaideurs* at the Théâtre-Club. Directed by Jan Doat with sets by Jean-Claude Rinfret

The Théâtre-Club drew audiences almost as large as those of the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde, in some cases—*La Nuit des rois*, *Les trois Mousquetaires*, *L'Heure éblouissante* and *Requiem pour une nonne*—exceeding 20,000. The company averaged three plays a season; only one Canadian work, Marcel Dubé's *Le Barrage* (1955), formed part of its regular repertory.



Marcel Dubé's *Le Barrage* produced at the Théâtre-Club in 1955, with Janine Sutto and Guy Godin. Sets by Michel Ambrogi



Faulkner and Camus' *Requiem pour une nonne*, a Théâtre-Club success under the direction of Louis-Georges Carrier

LE RIDEAU VERT

As indicated on an earlier page, the Rideau Vert at first brought together several actors from Pierre Dagenais' L'Equipe. Their original plan was to put on plays rather than form a regular company. After three inactive seasons, Yvette Brind'Amour reorganized the company which would have as competition the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde, already four years old, and the Théâtre-Club, then in its third season. Following a successful run of Félix Leclerc's *Sonnez les matines*, which gave it a fresh start, the Rideau Vert chose to limit most of its activities for two seasons to a tiny 90-seat theatre—L'Anjou—so that it might build up its strength.



Yvette Brind'Amour in Jean Cocteau's *L'Aigle à deux têtes* at the Rideau Vert

At the Anjou, the group made its début with a delightful Canadian play by Roger Sinclair, *La Boutique aux anges*, then gave brilliant productions of light comedies such as Gabriel Arout's *Guillaume le confident*, Noel Coward's *Les Amants terribles* (*Private Lives*), André Roussin's *La Petite Hutte*, Jean Bernard-Luc's *Le Complexe de Philémon*, Verhille and Mannoïr's *Monsieur de Falindor* and

John Van Druten's *La Magicienne en pantoufles* (*Bell, Book and Candle*). Coincidentally, the Rideau Vert presented Lorca's *Doña Rosita* at the Monument National; the play was only a *succès d'estime* but gave an indication of the company's basic ambitions. A revival of Sartre's *Huis clos* and Musset's *Les Caprices de Marianne* brought the group to its tenth anniversary, celebrated with de Montherlant's *La Reine morte*, lavishly produced under the direction of Paul Gury, with sets and costumes by Robert Prévost (1958).

Although these achievements by no means solved its problems, the company carried on with Bernanos' *Dialogues des Carmélites* and a Canadian première, *Edwige*, by the novelist Maurice Gagnon.

In 1960, still somewhat uncertain of what it should do, the Rideau Vert finally moved into the Stella, a small 400-seat theatre that had been completely modernized. Here, during its first six seasons, it produced more than fifty plays at the rate of one a month, as well as an annual topical revue. This new and better conceived policy soon proved its worth. The group promptly attracted an audience of between eight and twelve thousand, depending on the play. At first, the Rideau Vert concentrated on light comedy—Roussin, Roger-Ferdinand, de Létraz—which had brought success at the Anjou, but it gradually abandoned such purely popular plays and offered drama of high artistic value. Among the most memorable have been Claudel's *Partage de midi*, Giraudoux's *Pour Lucrèce*, Calderón's *L'Alcalde de Zalamea*, Somerset Maugham's *Constance* (*The Constant Wife*) and *Adorable Julia*, Marcel Achard's *L'Idiot*, Cocteau's *L'Aigle à deux têtes*, Georges Feydeau's *La Puce à l'oreille*, Shakespeare's *Songe d'une nuit d'été* (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), Pirandello's *On ne sait comment*, Molière's *Fourberies de Scapin* and *L'Etourdi*. Several of these productions were among the best offered during recent Montreal theatre seasons. In the autumn of 1963, the Rideau Vert was chosen to perform for the French Minister of Cultural Affairs, André Malraux, at the Montreal French Exhibition, where it presented Marivaux's *L'Heureux Stratagème*. It was such a success that the company was invited to give this play in Paris the following summer and, in 1965, to perform at the Théâtre de France (Odéon) two more plays, one of them being *Une maison, un jour* by the Canadian author Françoise Loranger.

The Rideau Vert quite correctly calls itself "the only permanent theatre in Canada". Its programme is the most varied and ambitious of any given in Montreal's theatres, with 275 performances annually, from September 15th to June 15th, an



Calderón's *L'Alcalde de Zalamea* at the Rideau Vert,
directed by Georges Groulx, sets by Robert Prévost

average of nine plays a year and thirty performances of each play. It is not strictly speaking a company although it has always been exclusively under Yvette Brind'Amour's management. Yet a number of directors and actors work there regularly enough to form a stable nucleus. The result is a varied—and occasionally clashing—repertory ; an Achard may succeed a Claudel or a Calderón, a Somerset Maugham follow a Giraudoux.

Yvette Brind'Amour herself produces only one play a year. The others are usually entrusted to two Montreal television producers, Florent Forget and Jean Faucher, as well as Georges Groulx and François Cartier. Visually, the productions have improved notably over the years ; in this department, stage designers Robert Prévost and Aras and costume designer François Barbeau have done work of great distinction.

THE MONTREAL FESTIVALS

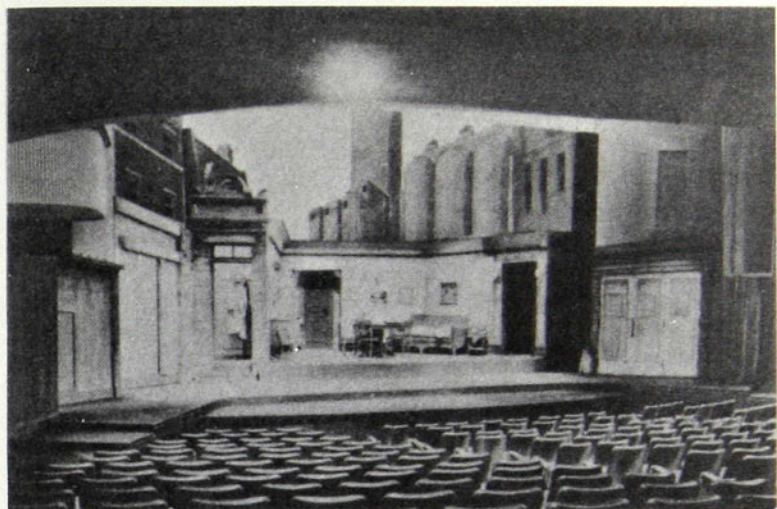
Besides the activities of regular companies, a word should be said about the annual dramatic productions of the Montreal Festival Society. At first devoted to opera, oratorio and concert music, the Festivals have since 1954 presented a first-rate play each summer, in recent years entrusted to one of Montreal's theatre companies. Jan Doat put on an impressive but controversial *Athalie* in 1956 ; Jean Meyer, then with the Comédie-Française, was asked to direct Corneille's *L'Illusion comique* in 1957 and Fernand Ledoux was invited to play Molière's *Tartuffe*, supported by an entirely Canadian cast, in 1958. Since then, the plays have been given by one of the principal Montreal companies (Théâtre du Nouveau Monde, Théâtre-Club, Rideau Vert) which takes full credit for its work and later adds the play to its permanent repertory.

LA COMÉDIE-CANADIENNE

In 1958, Montreal saw the opening of a fourth theatre when Gratien Gélinas founded the Comédie-Canadienne. It has more than 1,200 seats and is in fact Canada's best-equipped theatre. The founder's hope that it would be dedicated to the production of Canadian plays has only partially been fulfilled. The new theatre was launched with the brilliant production of a French work, Anouilh's *L'Alouette* (*The Lark*), directed by Gratien Gélinas and presented alternately by virtually the same cast in both French and English.

During the following season and until 1960, several major Canadian plays were given in Gratien Gélinas' theatre : Roger Sinclair's *Quand la moisson sera courbée*, previously played by the Théâtre-Club at the Dominion Drama Festival ; three dramas by Marcel Dubé, of which the first two had originally been shown on television and were adapted for the stage by their author—*Un simple Soldat*, directed by Jean-Paul Fugère, *Florence*, directed by Louis-Georges Carrier and, in 1965, *Les Beaux dimanches* ; *Le Cri de l'engoulevent* by the well-known television writer Guy Dufresne ; Jacques Languirand's *Le Gibet*, acted and directed by the author ; and finally, *Bousille et les justes*, a second play by Gratien Gélinas that won great acclaim and ran for the whole 1959-60 season in conjunction with a revival of Paul Toupin's *Brutus*. Occasionally, however, the Comédie-Canadienne ventured into foreign theatre, one of the more significant productions being the remarkably successful staging of Strindberg's *Mademoiselle Julie* by the actor Jean Coutu.

Because of the excessive cost involved in offering only plays written by Canadian authors, Gratien Gélinas had to give up this project and the theatre is now also used at intervals for film showings and French music-hall.



This set, seen from behind the orchestra seats at the Comédie-Canadienne, was designed by Jacques Pelletier for Marcel Dubé's *Un simple Soldat*. The play was directed by Jean-Paul Fugère



Model of the set by Jean-Claude Rinfret for Guy Dufresne's play, *Le Cri de l'engoulement*, produced at the Comédie-Canadienne in 1960

AVANT-GARDE THEATRE

In 1956, a few minor groups began to form outside the regular companies. They started out in very small theatres, experimented mostly with avant-garde productions and became an invigorating influence in Montreal theatre life. The Anjou alone remained faithful to its repertory of light comedy, putting on two plays a season, usually Paris "boulevard" successes.

The first attempts at experimental theatre were not all successful. The Amphitryon closed after a year's activity (1955-56) ; its principal contribution was introducing Ionesco to Montreal audiences with *La Leçon*, staged by Jacques Mauclair. The vacancy was soon filled by Jacques Languirand, whose first play, *Les Insolites*, was given at the Anjou in 1956. The young playwright also opened his own house, the Théâtre de Dix Heures, but it closed after a single season. There he revived *Les Insolites*, put on his own one-act play *Le Roi ivre* and became a pioneer in avant-garde theatre by successfully staging Samuel Beckett's *En attendant Godot* (*Waiting for Godot*), acted by students of the recently inaugurated Quebec Conservatory of Dramatic Art. He also sponsored a production of Jean Genêt's *Les Bonnes*.

Concurrently, Paul Buissonneau founded the Théâtre de Quat'sous, which relied mainly on amateurs and gave performances full of imagination and wit. The offerings for which it was best known, such as Guillaume Hanoteau's *La Tour Eiffel qui tue* and Henri-François Rey's *La Bande à Bonnot*, were more in the vein of music-hall and "boîte à chansons" than avant-garde theatre. After being inactive for six years, the Théâtre de Quat'sous has recently been re-established as a professional company under Paul Buissonneau in a new little theatre with 120 seats where it plans to concentrate on poetic drama (1965).

LE THÉÂTRE DE L'ÉGRÉGORE

Although these efforts were scattered and poorly organized, they led to the establishment of the first real experimental theatre in Montreal, the Théâtre de l'Égrégore. By founding it, in collaboration with some of Jacques Languirand's former associates, Françoise Berd served as catalyst for a variety of unresolved trends and gave them concrete form. Thanks to her, Montreal saw its first professional avant-garde theatre, which soon became one of the most dynamic factors in the city's cultural life.

L'Égrégore made its début in 1959 with an adaptation of Dostoevsky's *Une Femme douce*, which won first prize at the 1960 "Congrès du Spectacle" and placed the young company in the public eye. Interest grew with Samuel Beckett's *Fin de partie* (*Endgame*), Strindberg's *Le Pélican* and Tennessee Williams' *Été et fumées* (*Summer and Smoke*), their staging

marked by great restraint, stylized interpretation and a search for new modes of expression which drew a discriminating audience to the Égrégore. At first the plays were given in various halls; only at the beginning of the 1961-62 season was the company finally able to settle in a permanent theatre seating 130, where it performed for two impressive seasons, the second having been particularly brilliant.

In this little theatre on Clark Street, the group really came to life and developed an interpretive style which gave its productions a characteristic tone similar to that of New York's



Françoise Berd

off-Broadway theatre. After a Ghelderode, it presented *Qui est Dupressin ?*, an avant-garde play by the Canadian author Gilles Derome, which was a critical success. However, Chekov's *Ce fou de Platonov*, staged by André Pagé, demonstrated the Égrégore's appeal to a larger and more varied audience. After Jarry's *Ubu roi* and a double bill composed of Ionesco's *La Leçon* and *La Cantatrice chauve*, also directed by André Pagé, L'Égrégore was firmly established and able to consider expanding its activities.



Samuel Beckett's *Fin de partie* at the Théâtre de l'Égrégore, with Jean-Louis Millette and Jacques Godin in a haunting production
by Jacques Zouvi

Yet, L'Égrégore's greatest success to date, both commercially and artistically, was Roland Dubillard's *Naïves hirondelles*, directed by Jean-Louis Millette, which completely broke the little theatre's box-office record and remains one of the best Montreal theatre productions in the last five years. It afforded the painter Germain an opportunity to express himself in a setting marked by amazing breadth of style. The group ended the season with poetry readings devoted to Lautréamont, Rimbaud, Antonin Artaud and Brecht.

At the end of the 1962-63 season, L'Égrégore moved from its now overcrowded theatre to a larger (230 seats) and better located house where the company continued its previous policy. The first production in the new quarters was Ionesco's *Le Roi se meurt*, followed, among others, by Marcel Aymé's *Les Maxibules*, Roger Vitrac's *Victor ou les Enfants au pouvoir*, Audiberti's *L'Effet Glapion* and Arthur Kopit's *Le Placard* (*Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feeling So Sad*).

Françoise Berd has so far been satisfied to act as the group's administrator and manager, entrusting the task of directing to young actors like Roland Laroche, André Pagé, Jacques Zouvi and Jean-Louis Millette—most of them novices—and to a teacher from the National Theatre School, Jean-Pierre Ronfard. The only Canadian play so far staged by L'Égrégore is Gilles Derome's previously mentioned comedy.

The small audience of a few hundred that was first attracted to L'Égrégore has gradually grown into a few thousand devotees who attend all its performances.

Following the trend at the Égrégore, five young directors founded the Centre-Théâtre and devoted its entire 1961-62 season to avant-garde theatre and poetic drama. The first production, Ionesco's *Tueur sans gages*, was by far their best effort; its success was not matched by subsequent plays: Friedrich Dürrenmatt's *Le mariage de Monsieur Mississippi*, Félicien Marceau's *L'Oeuf* and Sean O'Casey's *Roses rouges pour moi* (*Red Roses for Me*). In 1962, the Centre-Théâtre suspended activities.

LA POUDRIÈRE

Related, though very distantly, to these little theatres is the Montreal International Theatre, founded in 1958 by Jeanine Beaubien. Its home on Saint Helen's Island is a converted powder magazine dating from the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Plays in five languages—French, English, German, Italian and Spanish—have been given in the 150-seat theatre nestled in a delightful rustic setting; its season extends from May to October or November.

In eight seasons, La Poudrière staged some forty plays, several of them in two and even three languages. So far, no Canadian play has been offered in a repertory whose major productions include Colette's *Gigi* (1958), an adaptation of Dostoevsky's *Crime et Châtiment*, Marcel Achard's *Marlborough s'en va-t-en guerre*, Ugo Betti's *La Reine et les insurgés*, Pirandello's *L'Homme, la bête et la vertu* in 1960, Strindberg's *Pâques*, Mouëzy-Eon and Gandéra's *La Folle nuit* (1961), Feydeau's *Occupe-toi d'Amélie* (1963) and Cocteau's *Les Parents terribles* (1964).

Plays in French and English have attracted most attention, the others having much more limited audiences. La Poudrière is by no means a regular company and has employed a great variety of directors and actors. Each year, some 20,000 people attend its plays, most of which are light comedy.



Jeanine Beaubien

LES APPRENTIS-SORCIERS

One of the most interesting elements in Montreal theatre life is the remarkable work of an amateur group, the Apprentis-Sorciers, founded in 1956 by Jean-Guy Sabourin. They have ever since maintained the same spirit of restraint and austerity in presenting productions of an almost entirely avant-garde nature.

For the past seven years, the Apprentis-Sorciers have regularly performed in a little theatre with only sixty seats, La



A striking example of avant-garde theatre: No and the journalist in Arthur Adamov's *La Parodie*, staged by the Apprentis-Sorciers

Boulangerie on de la Naudière Street. Here they work in anonymity and a community spirit where everything—sets, costumes, stage props—is made by members of the group. After several seasons devoted to learning their craft, they have become highly proficient amateurs, giving productions remarkable for their enthusiasm, dramatic intensity and inventiveness.

Their choice of plays is confined to experimental, avant-garde and poetic drama. Among the first thirty productions staged, the following merit mention : Beckett's *Fin de partie* (*Endgame*), Ionesco's *La Leçon*, *Jacques ou la Soumission*, *L'Avenir est dans les oeufs* and *Les Chaises* ; Adamov's *La Parodie* ; Synge's *Le Baladin du monde occidental* (*The Playboy of the Western World*) and *La Fontaine aux Saints* (*The Well of the Saints*) ; Lorca's *Don Perlimplin* ; Claudel's *Tobie et Sarah* ; Bertolt Brecht's *Homme pour homme* and *Maître Puntila et son valet Matti* ; Max Frisch's *Monsieur Biedermann et les incendiaires* ; Gorki's *Les Bas-fonds* as well as evenings of poetry reading, story telling and ballad singing. One of their most recent and best productions was a Canadian play first presented on television—*Au Coeur de la rose*, a poetic drama by Pierre Perrault (1963). Another Perrault play, *C'est l'Enterrement de Nicodème, tout le monde est invité*, was first performed at the Monaco Amateur Theatre Festival in September 1965. The Apprentis-Sorciers have drawn as many as 1,500 spectators for a single play ; and, although they represent one of the most modest efforts in the Montreal theatre world, they are one of its most distinctive and original elements.

Though the company is run on a co-operative basis, Jean-Guy Sabourin has been manager and principal director since its foundation. Thanks to the Apprentis-Sorciers, Montreal theatre-goers have been introduced to such outstanding playwrights as Brecht, Adamov, Synge and Max Frisch, and have had an opportunity to see most of the major works in the avant-garde theatre. Three to five plays are presented each season.

In 1966, Les Apprentis-Sorciers moved to a new theatre on Papineau Street in Montreal's East End.

LES SALTIMBANQUES

A dissident group, Les Saltimbanques, was formed in 1962 and opened in a little hundred-seat theatre close to the Bonsecours Church in the heart of old Montreal. Bolder in their experimentation than the Apprentis-Sorciers, they have displayed the same qualities of enthusiasm and restraint. Their search for different forms of dramatic expression was evident in the production of Romain Weingarten's *Akara*, Armand Gatti's *L'Enfant-rat* (1963) and *Pile* (1964) by a Canadian author, Roger Huard. The group consists of some fifteen amateur actors led and directed by Rodrigue Mathieu and Robert Singher.

Decentralization

SUMMER THEATRE

Summer theatre first appeared in 1956 when the actor Paul Hébert established one at Sainte-Adèle in the Laurentians. Their existence was at first precarious and their repertory consisted mainly of plays that had been previously successful in Montreal. They are the Canadian counterpart of the widely known "summer stock companies" in the United States.

Little by little, however, they have acquired identity and have begun presenting first-run plays sometimes later given Montreal productions. After a few years of experimentation, each would move into its own permanent quarters and establish its own tradition, light and rapidly-paced comedy being the usual fare. These theatres are a valuable spur to artistic decentralization, especially in regions at some distance from Montreal. There are now five of them in the province, each usually staging two plays during July and August.

The Théâtre de Marjolaine (seating 200), founded and managed by the actress Marjolaine Hébert, has been active since 1960 at Eastman in the Eastern Townships, about eighty miles from Montreal. Aside from offering plays by Ustinov, Feydeau, Cocteau and Noel Coward, the company revived Marcel Dubé's *Zone* under the direction of Louis-Georges Carrier and presented a musical comedy by Dubé based on Molière's *Le Misanthrope*.

Percé, on the Gaspé coast, has seen the work of various producers since 1957. In a little theatre of a hundred seats, Languirand staged two of his plays in 1958—*Les grands Départs*, which had until then only been televised and has not yet appeared in Montreal, and a one-act farce, *Diogène ou l'École du rire*, still unpublished. Since then, the Percé theatre has had several profitable seasons, principally thanks to the direction of Françoise Graton, who has put on plays by Musset, Guitry, Arthur Miller, Maurice Clavel and others. *Le Square*, by Marguerite Duras, ran for the whole of the 1963 season.

After several abortive attempts, the only permanent summer theatre in the Laurentians was established in 1961 at Sainte-Marguerite-du-Lac-Masson, forty-five miles from Montreal. In 1962, the Égrégore tried out two plays there which it later staged in Montreal, *Ubu roi* and the Ionesco double bill. The following summer, the 200-seat theatre was taken over by actors Georges Groulx and Guy Provost, who presented mostly light comedies.

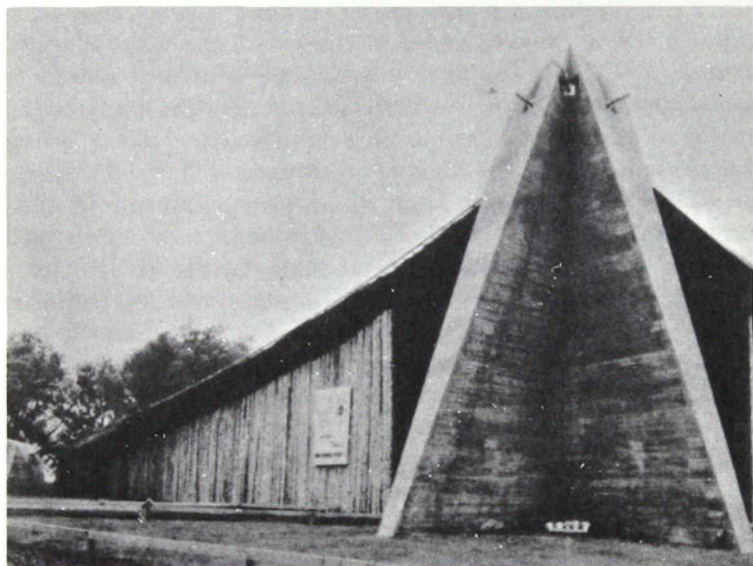
The summer of 1963 also saw Achard's *Patate*, revived from the Rideau Vert, Albert Husson's *La Cuisine des anges* and Osborne's *La Paix du dimanche* (*Look Back in Anger*) presented by the actor Jean Duceppe in a summer theatre—the 200-seat Théâtre des Prairies—he had founded the year before near Joliette, about fifty miles from Montreal.

The newest of the summer theatres is at Repentigny, some fifteen miles from Montreal, where the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde performed in 1963. The largest of the summer theatres, with 600 seats, it is most original and interesting from an architectural point of view. Its produc-



Jean Duceppe

tions are also the most ambitious ; during its first season it offered *Arsenic et vieilles dentelles* (*Arsenic and Old Lace*) and a melo-



The Summer Theatre at Repentigny

drama by the Douanier Rousseau, *La Vengeance d'une orpheline russe*, presented as a parody. In 1965, this theatre was operated by Paul Buissonneau, who presented Jean Canolle's farcical comedy *La Jument du roi*.

PROVINCIAL THEATRE

There are no professional companies outside Montreal. In Quebec City, however, the semi-professional Théâtre de l'Estoc

has been active since 1957. It replaced the Comédiens de Québec, founded by Pierre Boucher, which disbanded after several years' activity.

From the beginning, the Théâtre de l'Estoc has regarded itself as an experimental theatre. At first its actors remained anonymous—a policy later abandoned—and developed into a remarkable team, which acquired experience by touring the province before setting up shop in Quebec. After presenting a modern-dress version of *Les Précieuses ridicules*, the company made its début in the capital with *On ne badine pas avec l'amour*. Soon afterwards, it found suitable quarters in the outbuildings of an old house dating from the French régime where it installed a theatre now seating 125 and began to give regular seasons. Under the direction of Jean-Louis Tremblay and André Ricard, the Théâtre de l'Estoc gradually won the support of the Quebec public with *Les Insolites* by Languirand, *Éléonore* by the young Quebec poetess and novelist Marie-Claire Blais, *La Ménagerie de verre*, Marcel Aichard's *Voulez-vous jouer avec moi*?, *Les Morts* by the Spanish playwright Max Aub, Ionesco's *La Cantatrice chauve*, Ugo Betti's *Pas d'amour*, an adaptation of Gogol's *Journal d'un fou*, Jean Tardieu's *Théâtre de chambre*, Strindberg's *Créanciers* and, lately, a play by Montreal novelist Andrée Maillet. The company's high standards in selecting its repertory—it will have nothing to do with light comedy—indicate that the Théâtre de l'Estoc is likely to become the only permanent theatre in Quebec City.

There are some forty amateur groups in the province. Besides the Apprentis-Sorciers and Saltimbanques in Montreal and the Théâtre de l'Estoc in Quebec, which officially has not yet abandoned amateur status, a few others are worth noting. These are the Compagnons de Notre-Dame in Trois-Rivières, a company that has been in existence for thirty years and has known moments of glory at the Drama Festival, the Théâtre du Pont-Neuf in Hull, the Union Théâtrale française and the Atelier in Sherbrooke, the Fenièrre and the Grenouille in Quebec City.

Sherbrooke's Atelier, run by Father Roger Thibault, attracted wide attention in 1963 by winning first prize at the Dominion Drama Festival with *En attendant Godot* (*Waiting for Godot*). Formed in 1960, it had reached such proficiency after a year that it was adjudged the best group in its region when it put on Jean Berthet's *Les Vacances d'Apollon* at the regional trials for this same festival. It toured the Eastern Townships with this play, then presented Anouilh's *Le Bal des voleurs* and Pirandello's *La Jarre* in Sherbrooke. *En attendant Godot* not only won several awards for the Atelier in the regional trials, but went on to win first place in the Dominion Drama Festival with four awards. Since then, the group has staged Jacques Languirand's *Les Insolites*.

THE CANADIAN AMATEUR THEATRE ASSOCIATION

Little doubt exists that during the past few years the Drama Festival and the example of such groups as the Apprentis-Sorciers have greatly influenced the development of amateur theatre. All these organizations joined forces in the Association canadienne du Théâtre d'amateurs (ACTA), founded by Guy Beaulne in 1958, which includes French-language groups from all over the country, and thus welcomed from other provinces such companies as the Cercle Molière of Saint-Boniface, one of the oldest amateur groups in Canada, the Théâtre du Pont-Neuf of Ottawa-Hull and Vancouver's Troupe Molière. They hold an annual convention, publish a quarterly bulletin, have a library and expect to establish permanent head-



Guy Beaulne

quarters in Montreal. ACTA is at present divided into eight regional centres—Montreal, Quebec, Sherbrooke, Trois-Rivières, Ottawa-Hull, Northern Quebec, Moncton, Manitoba-Saskatchewan—and represents some forty groups, not counting almost as many affiliated educational institutions.

Outside Quebec, the most successful of the groups is Saint-Boniface's Cercle Molière, which has often won awards at the Dominion Drama Festival. It took part in the finals held at Sherbrooke in 1956 with *Les Fourberies de Scapin* and at Montreal in 1961 with Marcel Dubé's *Chambre à louer*.

THE DOMINION DRAMA FESTIVAL

In 1932, the Governor General of Canada, Lord Bessborough, instituted the Dominion Drama Festival at which the best English- and French-language amateur groups in the country compete annually. Trials are first held at the regional level, awards being made for such things as best production, direction, acting and visual presentation. Each company winning at the regional level is automatically invited to compete in the finals, held in a different city every year. Eight groups usually enter the finals, at the end of which a first prize is awarded.

Not until 1947 did groups from Quebec really begin to attract attention at the Festival. Les Compagnons de Saint-Laurent, competing for the first time, distinguished themselves by winning the Grand Prix with *Le Médecin malgré lui*. They repeated their triumph in 1951 with *Les Gueux au paradis*. However, since the competition is open indiscriminately to amateurs, semi-professionals and professionals, it no longer has much appeal for the regular Montreal companies—which long ago surpassed the elementary level required by the Festival—and they no longer participate. Indeed, short-lived groups are often organized in Quebec merely to enter the Festival in the hope of carrying off some prize. They almost always disband as soon as the Festival is over.

Yet since the Dominion Drama Festival during the past ten years has made a point of encouraging Canadian plays, several Quebec authors have won honours by entering their works. Such was certainly the case with Marcel Dubé, who made his début as a playwright at the Festival. Two of his plays—*Zone* in 1953 and *Chambre à louer* in 1955—won the Grand Prix. Novelist Jean Filiatrault won this award in 1954 with *Le Roi David*, and in 1956, Jacques Languirand's *Les Insolites* placed first at the western Quebec regional competition ; in 1963, novelist Claude Jasmin's *Le Veau dort* won the same honour.

Aid to the Theatre

SUBSIDIES

In 1956, thanks to Mayor Jean Drapeau's efforts, a system of subsidies—long demanded by press and artists alike—was established in Montreal. As a result, a Metropolitan Montreal Arts Council was set up to make annual grants to local groups. At the national level, the Canada Council, founded in 1957, also gives subsidies, principally to the same organizations. Finally, in 1961, Quebec set up its own Provincial Arts Council sponsored by the Department of Cultural Affairs which provides its own grants to the best professional and amateur groups in the province. In all three cases, grants are not fixed and can vary from year to year. Together they total more than \$500,000. In 1962, the Quebec Cultural Affairs Department contributed more than \$120,000 to the theatre ; the following year, over \$235,000.

In the summer of 1963, the Department created a theatre service in the Arts and Letters Branch. Its first director was Guy Beaulne, television producer as well as founder and president of the Association canadienne du Théâtre d'amateurs, who now is director of the Artistic Training Branch.

PLAYWRITING COMPETITIONS

Anxious to encourage Canadian playwrights, the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde established an annual competition in 1957, offering \$1,000 for the best original play. At first the prize money came from the Provincial Secretary's Department, but after 1961,

it was provided by the Cultural Affairs Department. Three of the award-winning plays have been staged by the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde : André Langevin's *L'Oeil du peuple* (1957), François Moreau's *Les Taupes* (1959) and André Laurendeau's *Deux Femmes terribles* (1961). No competition was held in 1960, and in 1962 the prize play, by Lise Lavallée, was not performed. Since then, the competition has been dropped.

In 1962, the Association canadienne du Théâtre d'amateurs inaugurated an annual competition for one-act plays, offering two prizes, one of three the other of two hundred dollars. Only one of these prizes was awarded in 1962 and 1963.

Staging

DIRECTION

Only with the emergence of the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde in 1951 did the director take his rightful place in French-Canadian theatre. Father Émile Legault, the founder of Les Compagnons, had been an unusually able producer rather than a true director. Before the TNM, only Pierre Dagenais, who founded and ran the Équipe from 1943 to 1948, had displayed the talents of a director, and he was strongly influenced by American realism.

At the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde, direction soon became the most important aspect of a play's production. Jean Gascon, who was responsible for most of the company's offerings, above all set the tone for everything it did. His work has always been conscientious, spiced with inventiveness, inclined towards the farcical side of comedy yet equally successful in its own way with drama. He staged almost all the Molière plays performed by the TNM and showed the breadth of his range by moving from Shakespearean tragedy to the charming fantasy of *La Cuisine des anges*, in handling the quiet realism of Marcel Dubé's *Le Temps des lilas*, in showing a remarkable fullness of style in *Venise sauvée* (*Venice Preserved*) and in demonstrating with Sacha Guitry's *Mon Père avait raison* that he could tackle the lightest of comedy with the same finesse and stylistic quality. During the past few years, he has indulged a taste for musical comedy, combining banter with fantasy in such productions as *L'Opéra de quat'sous*, *Irma la douce* and Jacques Languirand's *Klondyke*.

The more intellectual and intense Jean-Louis Roux brought the company admirable precision and economy of means in the plays entrusted to him—works by Claudel or Synge and André

Laurendeau's *Deux Femmes terribles*. Jean Dalmain has the same approach to Molière as Jean Gascon and generally follows his directing style.

The Théâtre du Nouveau Monde continues to be the only group which has never called on outside directors, thus achieving great homogeneity in its productions. In general, the company follows closely the styles established by the French theatre in the early post-war years and then by the Shakespearean productions at the Stratford Festival.

At the Théâtre-Club, Jacques Létourneau first made his mark in drama, then displayed balanced gaiety in comedies like *Les trois Mousquetaires*, *Le Mal court* by Audiberti and *L'Heure éblouissante*, one of his most brilliant achievements. The French director Jan Doat contributed to the prestige of the company with a *Nuit des rois* (*Twelfth Night*) reminiscent of strolling players and a sensitive production of Musset's *Le Chandelier*.

Directors, trained since 1952 in television but with previous theatrical experience, usually as actors, have worked at the Rideau Vert, the Comédie-Canadienne and sometimes also at the Théâtre-Club. The most notable are Florent Forget, Jean-Paul Fugère, Jean Faucher, Paul Blouin and Louis-Georges Carrier, and their contribution to the theatre world is becoming more and more important. They have generally been responsible for polished work of a high standard, sometimes achieving considerable depth, as did Forget in *Doña Rosita*, *L'Aigle à deux têtes* and *Le menteur*; Carrier, markedly influenced by cinema and television, in *Requiem pour une nonne*; Faucher in *Pour Lucrèce*, *Partage de midi* and several light comedies at the Rideau Vert; Fugère in Dubé's *Un simple Soldat* at the Comédie-Canadienne and Blouin in Pirandello's *On ne sait comment* at the Rideau Vert. More directly affected by the style of the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde, where they were primarily actors, Georges Groulx and Guy Hoffmann directed some brilliant comedies at the Rideau Vert, Groulx being responsible for *L'Alcalde de Zalamea* and *Le Songe d'une nuit d'été* (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) and Hoffmann for *La Puce à l'oreille*.



André Pagé directed a stunning production of Ionesco's *La Cantatrice chauve* at the Théâtre de l'Égégore

For the most part, directors at the Égrégoire have been young actors : Jacques Zouvi (*Fin de partie*), André Pagé (a Chekov play and an Ionesco programme), Roland Laroche, Yvan Canuel and Jean-Louis Millette. Working in small theatres on limited budgets, they have given proof of willingness to experiment. In the amateur companies, especially the Apprentis-Sorciers and the Saltimbanques, strict simplicity, imaginativeness and often extraordinary enthusiasm have characterized the work of Jean-Guy Sabourin, Rodrigue Mathieu and Robert Singher.

Finally there is Gratien Gélinas who directed his own two plays, *Tit-Coq* and *Bousille et les justes*, which show the influence of American realism.

SETS AND COSTUMES

Les Compagnons deserve credit for having swept the dust out of the Canadian theatre by freeing it from the conventional trappings inherited from bourgeois realism. Experimenting in fantasy, in vivid representation and colour, their set designers—most of whom have since left the theatre—were the first to devise successful stylization. Concurrently at L'Équipe, Jacques Pelletier, dean of Canadian stage designers, developed a different and more realistic style which utilized carefully planned lighting techniques more American than European in origin.

But we are again indebted to the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde for the vast strides in set and costume design which gave their productions a quality previously unknown. Jacques Pelletier indeed showed the hand of a master in such productions as *L'Avare* at the TNM and Anouilh's *L'Alouette* at the Comédie-Canadienne. Yet a new generation of artists—Robert Prévost and Jean-Claude Rinfret, for example—seeks above all to create stylized settings based on boldly accented architectural structure.

Robert Prévost, who began his career during the last years of Les Compagnons, is considered today the outstanding Canadian set designer. He is particularly at home in repertory

theatre where he has achieved spectacular successes, working primarily for the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde and the Rideau Vert. Thanks to him, great care has been given to the visual aspects of production. Heir to the great tradition of contemporary European designers, Robert Prévost at first worked on both scenery and costumes but he now undertakes only settings. Of the dozens he has designed for the TNM, the Théâtre-Club and the Rideau Vert, the most memorable are those for *Don Juan*, the three Molière farces, *Le Malade imaginaire*, *Le Temps des lilas*, *Les trois Mousquetaires*, *Venise sauvée* (*Venice Preserved*), *L'Opéra de quat'sous*, *L'Alcalde de Zalamea*, *L'Aigle à deux têtes* and *Le Songe d'une nuit d'été* (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*). Visually, these productions were of the highest order, comparable to what is done in the best of international theatre. Robert Prévost was also invited to design the costumes for two Shakespearean productions at the Stratford Festival in Ontario, *Othello* and *The Comedy of Errors*, both directed by Jean Gascon.

Jean-Claude Rinfret, who came to the theatre a little later, was appointed official set designer for the Théâtre-Club. Like Prévost, he has a feeling for balance in stage settings, and his work always maintains high standards. Particular mention might be made of his sets for *La Quadrature du cercle*, *Le Mal court*, *Celles qu'on prend dans ses bras*, *L'Heure éblouissante*, *Le menteur* and *Le Marchand de Venise*. The painter Mousseau gave expression to a new spirit in an impressive assembly of abstract forms for *L'Échange*, at the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde. At the Égrégore, he devised, with breathtaking effect, a series of coloured glass panels for *Été et fumées* and *Le Pélican*. Admiration has also been expressed for the work of set designers like Aras, who is more traditional; Germain, who made possible the outstanding success of *Naïves hirondelles*; Gendreau and Pierre Moretti, the latter strongly inclined towards research and experiment. The best costume designers are Solange Legendre and François Barbeau, who usually works with Robert Prévost.

Today, it is very rare for Montreal productions, particularly in repertory theatre, not to be at least very adequately staged, and often they are brilliant in their scenery and costumes.



A beautifully articulated set by Jean-Claude Rinfret for *Le Marchand de Venise*, at the Théâtre-Club. Directed by Jacques Létourneau

Television and Radio

Apart from giving actors and other theatre people their principal source of income, radio and, since 1952, televised theatre have made it possible for one segment of the public to become acquainted with an art with which it had previously had almost no contact.

For a quarter of a century, CBC radio has broadcast excellent drama which, since the advent of television, has ceased to be as important as it once was. Today it has little more than a strictly cultural and educational value. From the beginning, television theatre held a privileged place in the CBC's French programmes which it has generally retained ever since. A television drama service, set up at the start, has always been considered one of the network's major services, on occasion presenting that organization's most distinguished telecasts. As early as 1954 and 1955, the French network of the CBC had televised high-calibre plays, usually lasting an hour and a half but occasionally running to two hours or more when there was some special reason to give a work in its entirety.

Besides these twelve to fifteen distinguished plays televised each season, theatre of more popular appeal lasting one hour has been established, which during the past few years has generously welcomed Canadian writers.

Within a decade, the CBC's French television theatre has presented some two hundred plays, many by major dramatists : Racine, Molière, Musset, Chekov, Lorca, Pirandello, Shakespeare, Julien Green, Graham Greene. Several important Canadian plays have also been produced. The most outstanding were those by Marcel Dubé, which later usually found their way to the legitimate

stage, André Laurendeau, Jacques Languirand, Jean-Robert Rémillard and Robert Élie. Aiming at a wider audience, the theatre hour has presented comedies from French and foreign



Huguette Oligny and Henri Norbert in Victor Hugo's *Mille francs de récompense*, one of CBC's French Téléthéâtre productions

repertoires as well as American television plays in French adaptations and works by such Canadian authors as Claude Jasmin, Jean-Paul Filion, Jean Filiatrault and Andrée Thibault.

A team of competent producers was promptly enlisted to launch these ventures ; in addition to Pierre Dagenais and Georges Groulx, who were responsible for large-scale productions between 1954 and 1956, the network used the talents of Florent Forget, Jean-Paul Fugère, Louis-Georges Carrier, Guy Beaulne, Jean Faucher and Paul Blouin who often did most remarkable work. Technicians, set and costume designers as well as producers have

made significant contributions and belong to this large and experienced team of experts. Every season, several hundred actors are employed by television and therefore can join drama groups not able to guarantee them employment throughout the year.

The period of uncertainty, when television seemed to threaten the existence of legitimate theatre, has long since passed. In reality, television has undoubtedly brought the theatre an audience it never had before.

Drama Schools

In 1955, the Quebec government established in Montreal a Conservatory of Music and Dramatic Art, with a branch in Quebec City. Students are selected on a competitive basis for the three-year course and pay no tuition. The student receives a thorough training based on both classic and modern authors. Jan Doat was the first director of the Dramatic Art Department, being succeeded in 1958 by Jean Valcourt. Placed under the jurisdiction of the Cultural Affairs Department in 1961, the Conservatory has trained many of the best young actors in Canada today. In order to continue their training, a group of former students have organized their own Drama Centre which gives performances of French classics throughout the province.

The National Theatre School in Montreal was opened in 1960 under the general management of Jean Gascon, director of the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde. It gives a three-year course covering every branch of theatre work. Students come from all ten provinces, which contribute to the school's support. Although it is semi-private, charging some seven hundred dollars a year tuition, the NTS is dependent on subsidies from each province.

In addition to the schools, some professional actors, chiefly in Montreal, give private drama lessons.

The Birth of Canadian Playwriting

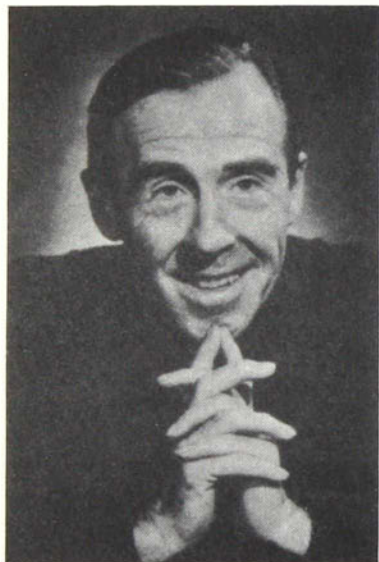
Until the advent of professional theatre in French Canada, it was difficult to create a distinctive dramatic literature that reflected French-Canadian society. Canadian authors naturally began writing for the stage only when the personnel and facilities necessary for an indigenous theatre gradually became available to them. This movement did not really get under way until Gratien Gélinas' *Tit-Coq* was produced at the Monument National in 1948—a play reflecting French-Canadian folkways in a fashion that has since had very few imitators. Preferring to explore psychological and social themes, French-Canadian drama has built up in recent years an interesting repertory to which three or four plays are added each season. During the past fifteen years, the most active Canadian playwrights have been Paul Toupin, Jacques Ferron, Jacques Languirand and Marcel Dubé. Except for Dubé, their output has been limited, but it constitutes a body of work that is beginning to have a character of its own.

GRATIEN GÉLINAS

Born in 1909, Gratien Gélinas began as a radio actor, creating his famous "Fridolin". In 1938, he produced the first of his annual revues for the stage, the *Fridolinades*. A sketch in one of his most successful revues led him to write his first play, *Tit-Coq*. It was produced in 1948 and ran for two hundred performances at the Théâtre du Gesù in Montreal, a run till then unequalled in French-Canadian theatre. Its success did not end there, for it was presented in other Quebec cities and, in an English version, toured the entire country and even some cities in the United States.

Written for a wide audience which knew the author and had been under his spell for ten years, *Tit-Coq* is a distinctly naturalistic play that reverberated in French-Canadian circles like a clap of thunder.

Gratien G  linas knew exactly what his public expected of him. The play is written in a racy idiom rich with Canadianisms and even Anglicisms, giving it a purely local flavour that strengthens its hold over French-Canadian audiences. The special appeal of *Tit-Coq* lay in its impudent tone, its obvious satirical intent, its fierce anti-militarism and its glorification of the little man. The diminutive soldier involved in a world conflict waged thousands of miles from his native land, a war which he does not understand because its basic causes escape him, was a well-wrought symbol of resistance and a form of protest for his compatriots of that day. Although its theme was strictly topical, this comedy was the French-Canadian theatre's first major success because of its picturesque language, its banter and its author's consummate skill.



Gratien G  linas

Tit-Coq is an illegitimate child, ill at ease in a conformist, sententious world. His self-esteem can only be restored by love and it comes in the form of Marie-Ange, the sister of an army buddy. *Tit-Coq* dreams of marrying her, but his regiment is about to leave for England. When he returns home, *Tit-Coq* finds his fianc  e already married. He tries in vain to win her back, but on the advice of his army chaplain, he resigns himself to his fate.

If the plot is somewhat melodramatic, the atmosphere of the play has typical French-Canadian gaiety, particularly in the

liveliness of its minor characters, who are drawn with unmerciful realism.

Bousille et les justes (1960), Gélinas' second play, was almost as resounding a success as *Tit-Coq*. It was first performed at the Montreal Festivals, then ran for a whole season at the Comédie-Canadienne. It was also staged elsewhere in the province, translated into English and played throughout Canada, and given in both languages on special television programmes.



Gratien Gélinas' *Bousille et les justes* produced in 1960 with Paul Berval, the author, Paul Hébert and Béatrice Picard

Bousille et les justes is similar to *Tit-Coq* in many ways. It, too, is a dramatic comedy written in the same vigorously idiomatic and satiric vein. The hero, Bousille, is also rejected by society because he is not very bright. His family treats him like a poor

relative and gives him insignificant chores to do. Its members come to Montreal to answer charges laid against one of them after a nightclub brawl. Bousille, who witnessed the incident, would inevitably give the court an account quite different from what the family wants. As his testimony threatens to compromise the family's reputation, Bousille chooses to hang himself rather than betray his conscience.

Gratien Gélinas directed both plays and played both title rôles, skilfully choosing casts that were able to bring out all the implications of his plots. With Félix Leclerc, he is still the principal exponent of French-Canadian drama drawn entirely from the local scene.

PAUL TOUPIN

Completely different in character, almost directly opposed to Gélinas', Paul Toupin's drama is above all classic, severe and devoid of compromise. It is significant that he has not chosen to develop a single Canadian theme, nor has he located any of his plots in Canada, which should give some indication of his scorn for the picturesque. *Brutus* (1952), the only play so far to have reached a wide audience, is a tragedy. His other two published plays are *Le Mensonge* (1952), set in fifteenth-century Brittany, and *Chacun son amour* (1955), which has no definite locale, yet certainly suggests nothing specifically Canadian. These three plays were published as his collected theatrical works in 1961. He has written a fourth play, *Le Choix*, which was given a few performances by the Compagnie du Masque in 1951, but has not appeared in print. *Le Choix* takes place in France, during the occupation.

Brutus remains Paul Toupin's major work to date. After being first produced at the Gesù by Pierre Dagenais, it was revived eight years later at the Comédie-Canadienne in 1960, a rare honour in the annals of French-Canadian theatre. The

play has depth and style, a certain nobility of tone and a tight, sharply delineated plot. Its main interest lies in the contrasting characters of Brutus and Caesar, the first a dreamer and reformer, the second a man who knows how to evaluate human beings, and therefore views them with both indulgence and contempt.

The play opens with a secret meeting between Brutus and two conspirators who plan to kill Caesar. The latter is about to pay Brutus a visit, which leads him to wonder whether Caesar is perhaps aware of the plot. Brutus is urged by his accomplices to take advantage of Caesar's visit and kill him then, but Brutus refuses and suggests instead that the assassination take place at the Capitol where Caesar is to go the next day to hear Cicero speak. Caesar arrives at Brutus' house disguised as a slave,

and announces his intention to be crowned king, even though Brutus warns him of the people's objection. Portia, Brutus' wife, reproaches him for neglecting her in favour of Caesar whereupon he confides to her that Caesar is to die the following day. Caesar hears of Brutus' plot from one of the conspirators. He sends for Portia and offers to pardon Brutus if the latter will agree to leave Rome. He is even prepared to appoint Brutus governor of Iberia. In the last act, Caesar goes to the Capitol and is assassinated while Cicero speaks eloquently of the Empire's destiny. In the epilogue, Brutus kills himself in the Roman campaign to which he has fled.

Le Mensonge is set in Brittany in the year 1480. An equerry takes possession of a chateau in the name of the French king. Only two women are there, the chatelaine and her old servant. The equerry brings the lady the king's order to marry her neigh-



Paul Toupin

bour, the Seigneur d'Arcourt, making her believe that Arcourt shares her sympathies for the rebels. Arcourt reveals to the equerry that he already loves the lady, who after requesting an interview with this gentleman, agrees to marry him. Once the wedding has taken place, Arcourt confesses his deceit, and tells the chatelaine that, in spite of his love for her, he only married her at the king's command. She refuses to listen to further explanations and considers her vows null and void since they were based on a lie. Arcourt leaves the chateau, but after three years have passed, is recalled by the chatelaine. He returns accompanied by the equerry whom he orders to feign love for the lady. He surprises them in each other's arms, draws his sword and wounds his wife. In the end they confess their love for each other.

This terse drama unfolds in three short acts. Like *Brutus*, it is noteworthy for its beauty of language and lofty dramatic action which goes straight to the heart of the matter.

Chacun son amour is a modern comedy, likewise in three short acts, written with a serene mastery of dramatic technique and remarkable directness. The dialogue is sharp, uncluttered and ironic. It presents an enigmatic Don Juan, a seducer now retired and scornfully indifferent. A variation on the eternal Don Juan theme, *Chacun son amour* is a rather cynical and disenchanting play reminiscent of de Montherlant.

Fernand, Stéphane's secretary, announces his approaching marriage but does not want his employer to meet his fiancée, lest he seduce her. Stéphane proposes a test : that Fernand introduce him to his fiancée and let nature take its course. Céleste quickly yields to Stéphane's charms and, when Fernand unexpectedly arrives, they are surprised in each other's arms. Stéphane tells his secretary that Céleste loves him and that he has won the test. He feigns illness to get Fernand out of the way, but the pretended attack is followed by a real one that cripples him. The two young people leave, refusing to give him any help. One of Stéphane's former mistresses, Hélène, comes to tell him that she no longer loves him, that she is completely cured of her love. Fernand and Céleste finally ask forgiveness. Stéphane sends the

two women away and begins dictating his memoirs to his secretary. He cannot finish and dies in his chair.

Le Choix, as yet unpublished, revolves around the dilemma of a mother who has to choose which of her two sons she will give up to the German officer who has come to claim a hostage.

MARCEL DUBÉ

While still in his thirties, Marcel Dubé had become the most prolific of Canada's dramatists. Seven of his plays were produced between 1952 and 1965, three of them having previously been shown on television.

Dubé obviously considers theatre the ideal vehicle for an author wishing to express the soul of a people. Indeed, seldom has anyone expressed as well as Dubé the hopes and disappointments, the illusions and disenchantments of the French-Canadian people. His plays are important, not so much for their literary style—which is not his primary concern—but for the insight which enables him to grasp basic elements, to perceive what is enduring in the life of a people and to seize that intimate quality of the French-Canadian soul which is so hard to define. Marcel Dubé expresses what he feels with force and power, without any need for subterfuge or poetic devices. His characters lead a hard, relentless life, following a pattern often encountered in American drama. There is no perceptible French influence in Marcel Dubé's work.



Marcel Dubé

All his plays have pronounced social themes. This was as true of *Zone*, presented at the 1952 Drama Festival, as it was of *Les Beaux dimanches*, produced at the Comédie-Canadienne

in 1965. *Zone*, his first play, tells of a group of teenagers and young people from a poor section of Montreal who are involved in cigarette smuggling between Canada and the United States. During an incident at the border, a customs official is killed and the leader of the group gives himself up to the police. We witness his cross-examination in a dramatic second act, and then his tragic death. This concern for realism in drama creates an atmosphere of suspense that is sustained by Dubé's unflinching use of everyday language. We hear a moving cry of protest from these young people who are helpless before the justice of their elders.

The social aspect is more fully developed in *Le Barrage* (1956) which restates certain claims of the French-Canadian people. *Chambre à louer* (1955) evokes oppressive family surroundings from which a young girl longs to escape; she pays with her life for her desire to break away from her environment. This was the first of Dubé's plays to be televised before going on the legitimate stage for which it was originally written. He has successfully injected a measure of tragedy, which often reaches moments of grandeur, into a genuinely French-Canadian environment, expressing it in simple, straightforward language that occasionally touches on the poetic, thus bringing relief to a style that would otherwise have little distinction. As a study of character in a simple home environment, *Chambre à louer* is true to the daily life of a somewhat less than prosperous French-Canadian family.

In 1958, two of Dubé's plays appeared on the stage within a few months of each other: *Le Temps des lilas*, produced at the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde, and *Un simple Soldat*, at the Comédie-Canadienne. More poetic and less violent than his other works, *Le Temps des lilas* creates an atmosphere which some critics found reminiscent of Chekov. This is true to the extent that Marcel Dubé achieves a certain simplicity in depicting people and events. Little takes place, life flows along easily despite a few happenings which stand out enough to make their mark on



Radio-Canada's telecast of *Ô Voyageurs*, produced by Marcel Dubé and Georges Dor, with François Tassé and Michèle Rossignol



Marcel Dubé's *Le Temps des lilas* produced at the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde. Directed by Jean Gascon with sets by Robert Prévost

lives so devoid of surprise. The outstanding achievement of this play is its presentation of an elderly couple whose tenderness and ingenuousness are very touching. The little house, complete with garden and swing, where they have lived happily is being expropriated and they must leave. The dramatic essence of *Le Temps des lilas* is the collapse of an outdated yet wise world when it encounters the aggressiveness of modern life.

Un simple Soldat is entirely different. One has to go back to Gabrielle Roy and her novel *Bonheur d'occasion* (*The Tin Flute*) to find an author who is able to grasp and express with such accuracy and vividness the euphoria curiously mixed with anxiety that the French Canadians felt immediately after the Second World War. Through the eyes of a poor soldier demobilized from the Canadian army and of his family divided by hatred and weakness, Marcel Dubé, in the manner of an ancient fresco painter, has given a vivid, sometimes epic picture of French-Canadian life during the post-war years. Rarely has Dubé been able to display the influence of American drama, particularly that of Tennessee Williams and O'Neill, as effectively as in this play. We find in *Un simple Soldat* all the disillusionments which ordinarily beset the warrior who has come home. Joseph is out of tune with life and finds it very hard to adapt himself to his family surroundings. Such is the crux of this work, perhaps the most aggressive in all French-Canadian theatre. Here again one finds Dubé's sensitive understanding of humble people, his harsh realism, his gift for accurate observation and that love for his fellow-man which probably is the basic justification of all his work.

Florence (1960) is a drama of the people, restating themes found in other plays, in particular the inability to adapt to one's environment and the impossibility of breaking away from it without setting in motion the whole tragic mechanism of fate. Everyday life, akin to that depicted in *Chambre à louer* and *Le Temps des lilas*, is here reproduced in all its boredom, from the office where Florence works as a receptionist to the family dining-room where a humble life flows on. In depicting the

mediocre life of mediocre people who no longer have the energy to be anything else, *Florence* is a social document which comes close to being an indictment. The play centres around a little secretary's dreams of another life and her refusal to give in to her fate. It violently denounces a way of life built on fear of risk, on sheer routine, on total abdication in the face of any effort towards possible salvation. This denunciation was amplified in Dubé's latest play, *Les Beaux dimanches*, which depicts the French-Canadian bourgeoisie as devoid of all idealism.

Marcel Dubé's dramatic work so far has held a faithful mirror to the various aspects of ordinary life in French Canada. It is a drama which is not really concerned with esthetics and delights in the starkest realism to be found in the great works of contemporary American writers.

JACQUES LANGUIRAND

Not much older than Dubé, Jacques Languirand has already to his credit five plays that show complete indifference to any French-Canadian context. His drama has no definite geographic location. He has obviously been strongly influenced by the theatre of Beckett, Ionesco and Vauthier. In fact, he is the only French-Canadian playwright to claim kinship with these new developments in the drama.

Languirand launched his career in 1956 with an avant-garde comedy, *Les Insolites*. It won him first prize at a regional drama festival. In 1957, *Les grands Départs* was shown on television; although it had been written for the stage, it has been produced in that medium only at Percé. In 1958, Jacques Languirand returned to comedy



Jacques Languirand

with *Le Gibet*, in 1960 with *Les Violons de l'automne* and 1965 with *Klondyke*, produced as a musical comedy by the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde.

Les Insolites falls somewhere between detective-story farce and avant-garde impromptu. The dialogue is light yet witty, using a great many clichés, maxims and trite phrases given special shades of meaning. If the characters in this entertainment are really *insolites*—or out of the ordinary—the plot none the less unfolds in normal, logical fashion, and there is nothing abstruse about the play. The action takes place in a bar where a murder is committed, thus giving the characters an opportunity to rid themselves of their complexes at a session which wholly reveals their personalities. But the investigation turns into absurdity when the person placed under arrest is none other than the obvious criminal in the play, since he had the revolver in his hand when the police inspector first arrived upon the scene. *Les Insolites* is a milestone in the history of French-Canadian theatre, because with it the avant-garde gained a foot-hold in a dramatic literature that is still in the making. It is also Languirand's best comedy.

Very different is *Les grands Départs*, which takes the form of a tragedy equally ludicrous and verging on the absurd. A family is waiting for the movers to pick up their furniture. For each member of the family, this change in residence—itsself symbolic—represents a means of escape, especially for Hector, the father, who after twenty years of vain attempts is finally about to produce a novel. But this hope of escape is short-lived. The "great departure" never takes place and the curtain finally falls on exactly the same scene as it revealed when it first rose. Midway between the tragedy of daily tedium and the burlesque comedy to which this tedium can give birth, *Les grands Départs* is perhaps one of the most original works in French-Canadian drama.

Le Gibet and *Les Violons de l'automne* are not so sharply etched. In *Le Gibet*, Jacques Languirand has tried to show the problem of one man alone, fighting the pressure of a group. Perched on a pole in the hope of setting a world endurance

record, Perplex is a misunderstood man, rejected and ridiculed by the people of his neighbourhood, who see only a pointless stunt in his exploit. Perplex, on the other hand, wants to believe in his wife's fidelity, in the beauty of the world. Seen from aloft, this world disappoints him as much, if not more, than seen from below, and he remains a defeated soul. The language of *Le Gibet* is, as always in Languirand, a truly dramatic language—firm, paradoxical, rich in symbols.



Jacques Languirand's *Le Gibet* produced at the Comédie-Canadienne

Les Violons de l'automne adopts a more grating tone. We see three old people playing a comedy of love in a shabby room. To escape reality, they pretend they are young, invent travels and, unable to taste a happiness which escapes them, they dream. Two of the characters having the same name, Eugène, confusion arises that leads to a series of misunderstandings and a dénouement that is as grotesque as it is tragic when one of the Eugènes

does away with his namesake. This play was performed in Montreal in 1960, and in Paris three years later.

Also by Jacques Languirand is the one-act play, *Le Roi ivre*, first produced in 1956. It is the most poetic and most dream-like of his works, influenced more by Ghelderode than by French avant-garde theatre. Languirand's last play, *Klondyke* (1965), is a musical comedy similar to the *Threepenny Opera*, and takes place at the time of the gold rush. It was produced with success by the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde.

JACQUES FERRON

Author of four full-length and three one-act plays, Jacques Ferron is unique in the French-Canadian theatre since he has never been staged in Montreal by a professional company. Three of his works—*L'Ogre* in four acts, *Le Licou* and *Le Dodu* in one act—were produced by Marcel Sabourin on a modest scale and given a few performances at the Théâtre-Club's Studio in 1958. Ferron's other plays, notably *Le Cheval de Don Juan* (1958) and *Les grands Soleils* (1958), have not yet had their premières. Yet all of his dramatic output has been published.



Jacques Ferron

Although he has achieved greater success as a *conteur*—storyteller—Jacques Ferron is one of the major dramatists in French Canada. Even if his plays are not often performed, they are widely read, for he is sensitive to the spell of words and writes in a brisk, lively, supple style. His dramatic works take their inspiration from medieval farces,

Molière comedies and old folk tales. The characters are gently sketched and exude a quiet aura of fantasy. This holds true for all the early plays up to *Le Cheval de Don Juan*.

Lately, in *Les grands Soleils* and *La Tête du roi*, Jacques Ferron has shown his awareness of the newly awakened French-Canadian nationalism, with which he is mainly in sympathy. Both the 1837-38 rebellion and the contemporary world provide the setting for *Les grands Soleils*. It portrays Chénier, the patriot of Saint-Eustache, who embodies boldness and affirmation of self as opposed to prudence and reason, represented by the village priest, and to the indifference shown by the farmer, Félix Poutré, a typical man of the people who does not want to get involved. In *La Tête du roi*, Ferron builds an ironic fantasy, typical of his new style, around the dynamiting of a statue in Montreal.

OTHER DRAMATISTS

Félix Leclerc : Better known as a songwriter and singer, Félix Leclerc is the author of six plays which have all been performed. His first was *Maluron*, a satire on the film world, given by Les Compagnons in 1947. But his first real success came two years later with *Le p'tit Bonheur*, a series of sketches which bring out his talent for story-telling. Next came *La Caverne des splendeurs*, a fairy tale in one act. Among his most recent plays, *Sonnez les matines* (1956) and *L'Auberge des morts subites* (1963) show a more popular approach that appeals to a wider public, the latter having run for one hundred and fifty performances. *Sonnez les matines* is a comedy about village customs, while *L'Auberge des morts subites* and his last play, *Les Temples*, are fantasies that put contemporary society on trial.



Félix Leclerc

Éloi de Grandmont : Making his literary début with three slender volumes of verse, Éloi de Grandmont then turned to the theatre and wrote *Un Fils à tuer*, a family drama depicting the conflict between two generations of French colonists settled in Canada at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The father, who was born in France, has made Canada his new home, while the son, born here, dreams of the old country which he will never know. This ideological conflict is somewhat static, presented in highly literary form, with very little action. *Un Fils à tuer* was staged in 1950. Four years later, the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde gave a one-act farce—*La Fontaine de Paris*—written by the same author in a style clearly based on folklore. Éloi de Grandmont was also co-author with

Louis-Georges Carrier of *Soif d'aimer*, a most skilful parody which brought a wholly new tone to Canadian theatre. It was a great success when given at the Anjou in 1961.

Lomer Gouin : This young author, who died long before his time, left a whimsical comedy, *Polichinelle*, which was performed in 1950. It is written in verse, presenting characters from the *Commedia dell'arte* and draws its inspiration from the plays of Rostand.



François Moreau's *Les Taupes*, winner of the 1959 Théâtre du Nouveau Monde competition, was produced by the company that year

Yves Thériault : One of the most prolific of Canadian writers, Yves Thériault is the author of more than ten novels which make him an impressive figure in Canadian literature. He has written a play called *Le Marcheur*, a hearty peasant family drama performed in 1950.

André Langevin : Also a novelist, André Langevin has written two plays performed by the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde : *Une Nuit d'amour* (1954), located in Acadia after the English occupation, and a satirical comedy, *L'Oeil du peuple* (1957).

Roger Sinclair : Three plays by this young author were staged between the years 1955 and 1957, two of them at the regional Drama Festival. Since then he has not written for the theatre. His three works show remarkable dramatic intensity and are set in different provinces of Canada : *Ceux qui se taisent* (1955) in Nova Scotia, *La Boutique aux anges* (1956) in Alberta and *Quand la moisson sera courbée* (1957) in Saskatchewan. These plays, which have not yet been published, are clearly influenced by modern American drama.

François Moreau : Born in 1930 and now living in London, François Moreau has contributed only one play to Canadian theatre, *Les Taupes*, which is one of the most powerful and best constructed works in Canadian dramatic literature. It won the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde competition in 1959 and was produced by the company that year. One of the rare plays of rebellion in the Canadian theatre, *Les Taupes* illustrates with bitter irony the conflict between two generations. A markedly anti-bourgeois drama of family life, it is a carefully constructed, skilfully developed, cynical and irreverent attack on family respectability, with dialogue that is sharp, incisive and direct.



André Laurendeau

André Laurendeau : Considered one of the best journalists in French Canada, André Laurendeau has written two plays : *La Vertu des chattes*, in one act, produced first on television and later at the Percé Summer Theatre, and *Deux Femmes terribles* (1961), in three acts, performed by the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde after winning its competition.

It has a gentleness and reserve that questions, by suggestion rather than statement, several attitudes of the French-Canadian upper middle class.

Robert Élie : Novelist and cultural adviser to the Quebec Delegation in Paris, Robert Élie is the author of only one play, *L'Étrangère*, published in 1954 but performed only on television. It is a delicate work, in an emotional, melancholy mood. The "stranger" is Lou, a refugee who fled post-war Europe to seek, after excess of suffering, a peaceful haven. With time, however, her oasis threatens to become too comfortable, to turn into "one long habit". Lou becomes Pascal's mistress, but their past lives are so different that she realizes they will never really understand one another. Finally aware that they cannot retrace the road to the past together, Lou and Pascal separate. In reality there are two worlds that have nothing in common, one world crippled by pain and suffering, another comfortable but devoid of joy. A play like *L'Étrangère* hovers at the soul's edge, which is what makes of it a fragile yet precious achievement in Canadian writing for the stage. It is also notable for the purity of its French style.

Anne Hébert : Poet and novelist, Anne Hébert has written one drama, *Le Temps sauvage*, published in 1963 but not yet performed. Of all Canadian plays, it is perhaps the most reminiscent of Chekov. In a house high on the mountains, Agnès has brought up her children away from all that might corrupt their simplicity. They live an ingrown existence, having as few contacts as possible with the outside world. But Agnès' children seek ways of escape in accordance with their dreams : for Sébastien this is painting, for Lucie, study. The arrival of a beautiful and elegant cousin, Isabelle, fleetingly disturbs their quiet lives and allows the dreams to take shape. But each soon returns once more to the order established by Agnès, an order divorced from consciousness, where questions and answers play no part, where the sense of responsibility for one's actions loses all value. There remains only the *temps sauvage* where nature is the only teacher but where Agnès eventually learns to relinquish some of her inflexibility. Not easily classified, feminine in its sensibility, *Le Temps sauvage* casts light on the latent conflict between the forces of nature and the forces of the intellect, so that here the drama of solitude assumes an almost universal meaning.

Pierre Perrault : Film producer and poet, Pierre Perrault has written two plays : *Au Coeur de la rose*, a poetic drama televised in 1958 and given in a new version by the Apprentis-



Pierre Perrault's *Au Coeur de la rose*, televised in 1958 and staged by the Apprentis-Sorciers in 1963

Sorciers in 1963, and *C'est l'enterrement de Nicodème, tout le monde est invité*, also produced by the same group (1965). With a straightforward plot, *Au Coeur de la rose* shows great strength impelled by lyric power. It is a Canadian play, not because of its local colour and story, but because of the spirit in which it is steeped and the atmosphere it creates. There is not much action except that, as one character puts it, "a little time goes by". The

theme is again that of solitude, so often used by French-Canadian dramatists, but here solitude is represented by a lonely fisherman's cottage perched on a cliff, to which the sea contributes merely the reason for its existence. All the shutters are closed to the outside world. In the house a woman wastes away, whilst a man prowls around it. The distances between them prevent them from ever communicating. The story of *Au Coeur de la rose* is timeless and could take place anywhere in the world ; what makes the work Canadian is its poetry which is always in contact with the soil, the sea and the people on a very specific bit of earth.

Gilles Derome : Like Jacques Languirand, Gilles Derome represents a new avant-garde. He has written one play—*Qui est Dupressin ?*—staged by the Égrégore in 1961, an enigmatic, spirited, attractive comedy whose technique is original and effective. Its irony and aggressive attitude are thinly disguised. Some critics have seen beneath its attack on those afraid to live, an indictment of Quebec's entire middle class. If this play does not answer all the questions it raises, it at least shows that Gilles Derome is an alert dramatist who has firm, effective language at his command and is able to present authentic characters on the stage. It is one of the most unusual works in the Canadian theatre.

Eugène Cloutier : Novelist and television writer Eugène Cloutier has written but a single play for the stage, *Le dernier Beatnik*. In this bourgeois drama he attempts to show that the land of supermarkets is incapable of devising an art worthy of its vast material resources. The North-American country he has depicted is a country without soul, which denies the artist the right to express himself as he wishes. This idea is embodied in a painter, Ronald, who finds the quiet happiness of his friends Jenny and Peter unbearable, and decides to destroy it. Ronald, however, does not emerge unscathed from this new game of truth or consequences played within the framework of the classic triangle. Written in a sometimes ironic, sometimes deliberately dry style, the play presents characters who, if a trifle remote, are nevertheless able to create a dramatic atmosphere of considerable intensity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let us recall that the theatre in French Canada has developed considerably during the past quarter century so that it is now one of the more exciting aspects of our cultural life. This achievement was made possible by reviving the French classics, exploring modern and contemporary theatre, and adopting a special style of acting that owes nothing to other countries, by an undisguised interest in all new forms of theatrical expression including the avant-garde and, finally, by the birth of an indigenous drama that is only now coming into its own. The future is bright even if here, as everywhere else in the world, the theatre goes through crises of brief duration. The survival of the companies is assumed by the financial support of the Canada Council, the Quebec Department of Cultural Affairs and, in Montreal, by the Metropolitan Montreal Arts Council. The theatre in French Canada may evolve new forms better suited to its needs, but certainly it will never again become stagnant, for it is one of the most dynamic and original elements in French-Canadian culture.

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ANDRÉ LAURENDEAU — *La Vertu des chattes* (Écrits du Canada français, tome V, Montréal, 1959) — *Deux Femmes terribles* (Écrits du Canada français, tome XI, Montréal, 1961).

FRANÇOIS MOREAU — *Les Taupes* (Écrits du Canada français, tome VI, Montréal, 1960).

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Important Dates

- 1938 — Les Compagnons de Saint-Laurent founded by Father Émile Legault
- 1948 — Gratien Gélinas' *Tit-Coq* staged
Rideau Vert founded by Yvette Brind'Amour
Théâtre des Compagnons opened
- 1951 — Théâtre du Nouveau Monde founded by Jean Gascon
- 1952 — Paul Toupin's *Brutus* staged
Les Compagnons disbanded
- 1953 — Marcel Dubé's *Zone* staged
- 1954 — First production by Théâtre-Club, founded by Jacques Létourneau and Monique Lepage
- 1955 — Théâtre du Nouveau Monde's first appearance at Théâtre des Nations in Paris
Dramatic Art Department attached to the Quebec Conservatory
- 1956 — Jacques Languirand's *Les Insolites* staged
Les Apprentis-Sorcières founded by Jean-Guy Sabourin
- 1958 — Théâtre du Nouveau Monde production of Marcel Dubé's *Temps des lilas*, which is also staged at the Théâtre des Nations in Paris, and in Brussels
Jeanine Beaubien's Théâtre International de Montréal opened
- 1959 — Théâtre de l'Égrégore founded by Françoise Berd
François Moreau's *Les Taupes* staged by Théâtre du Nouveau Monde
Association canadienne du Théâtre d'amateurs formed by Guy Beaulne
- 1962 — Gilles Derome's *Qui est Dupressin?* staged by l'Égrégore
- 1963 — Théâtre des Saltimbanques opened
Theatre service, directed by Guy Beaulne, created in the Cultural Affairs Department
- 1964 — Rideau Vert's first appearance in Paris
- 1965 — Rideau Vert staged Françoise Loranger's *Une maison, un jour* in Russia and Paris
Théâtre du Nouveau Monde staged Jacques Languirand's *Klondyke* in London

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