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montreal repertory theatre

"The Lady's
Not
For Burning"

by Christopher Fry

in this issue

THE NEW SEASON

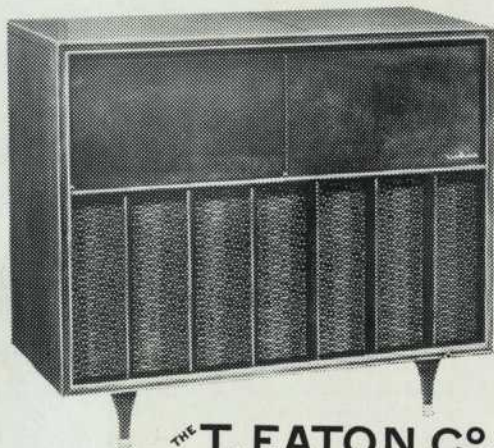
THE OLD VIC

THE RAINMAKER, BY N. RICHARD NASH

OCTOBER 1956 • VOLUME XXVIII • NUMBER 1

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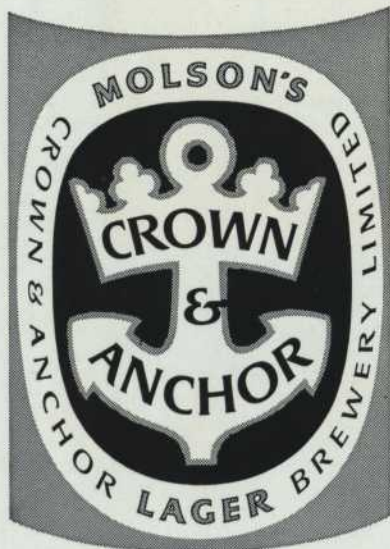
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THE NEW SEASON

With this extended run of *The Lady's Not For Burning* — eight performances in two weeks — MRT is introducing the first of several developments which should make this 28th season at least interesting; at best memorable.

Six productions are planned for the year, all to be played on this Wednesday to Saturday basis, on two consecutive weeks. The two intervening nights, Monday and Tuesday, will be available to community groups for theatre parties.

All performances will be given in the Van Horne Auditorium. MRT has felt for some time that the ends of a continuing theatre are best served through consistent use of a comparatively intimate auditorium. We are very grateful to the Principal, Mr. W. Sargent, and the Protestant School Board, for their co-operation.

By scheduling more productions MRT is frankly aiming to consolidate permanently its position on the Montreal scene. Times change, and though MRT has now been a local tradition for twenty-seven years, it must move with those times to maintain its place in the community — and its worth to the community.

Light, popular fare is now widely available, not only through television, but through the surge of skilled, professional summer stock. Opportunities to share in the wealth of great dramatic literature are still, however, rare enough here to spur MRT's determination to concentrate as much as possible on the works of the great playwrights.

As a further step, negotiations are now under way with Actors' Equity Association. Many contributory factors are involved in this decision. One instantly obvious to the public at large is that, as an Equity Theatre, MRT could take advantage of the current fame and fortune of many of its graduates. Though often willing to return for a production, most of the more successful alumni are unable to do so under present regulations.

MRT is always aware that one of its functions is to provide a training and testing ground for promising talent. Both the theatre and its public would be enriched, however, could this talent be tapped once it is fulfilled.

These then — more plays, good plays, longer runs, Equity status — are the major planks in MRT's policy this year.

Backstage there has been considerable activity too. Two more rooms have been taken in the Mechanics' Institute on Tupper Street, thus bringing rehearsal space, costumes, props, library and office back under one roof.

In planning its 28th season MRT is still actively aware of the great backbone of the theatre — all the people willing to work at it. The number of would-be workers at MRT has now reached 750, not all of whom can be absorbed in the six regular productions. Plans are now going ahead for more ambitious Theatre Club productions, the Board very heartened by the great success of the small "experimental" programs given last season by this active and devoted branch.



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MRT . . . presents

THE RAINMAKER

A "Romantic Comedy"
by N. RICHARD NASH

"This play is a comedy and a romance." That is what Richard Nash wrote of his own play, *The Rainmaker*. And Nash continued, "It must never be forgotten that it is a romance, never for an instant by the director, the actors, the scenic designer or the least-sung usher in the theatre."

MRT is stepping lightly aside for a moment from its series of Great Playwrights to give the Montreal premiere of *The Rainmaker* as its second production this season. Where *The Rainmaker* has gone, audiences have welcomed it warmly for the happy, sentimental thing it is. It seemed to MRT that Montreal theatre-goers should be given an opportunity to enjoy it here.

The play is set in some Western state of the United States. It is summer time, hot and dry. The whole area is parched for rain. In the Curry home, a father, his daughter, Lizzie, and his two sons, Noah

and Jim, are worrying about the drought. Their fields are scorched; their cattle are dying.

In the heart of H.C., the father, is a larger anxiety. It is concern for his daughter Lizzie, who has no beau and who is inarticulately yearning for love and marriage. Noah and Jim and H.C. decide to rustle up a man for her themselves, and invite the sherriff's assistant for supper. Fully aware of the purpose behind the invitation, he refuses. Lizzie, fluttering in her best clothes for the occasion, is bitterly shamed and deeply hurt.

The door of the Curry house flies open, and there stands Starbuck, a self-proclaimed rainmaker. He is a braggart, a dreamer, a star-gazer who cannot fit himself into the world of reality. He is a man too unconcerned with material things to be scrupulous about money, and too sensitive in his human relationships to withstand the urge to interfere in the lives of others. Noah, a materialist, rejects him unconditionally. Lizzie, half dreamer, half realist, is frightened by him. H.C. deliberately determines to gamble on an act of faith, and Jim enthusiastically sides with him.

A hundred dollars is paid to Starbuck to produce rain within twenty-four hours. For the remainder of the evening, tensions mount and Starbuck causes emotional explosions from all members of the Curry family. When the sherriff and his assistant arrive to pick him up as a "con" man, Starbuck has given Lizzie faith in her womanhood and confidence enough to choose between dreams and reality. A moment before the final curtain, thunder is heard; Starbuck has given them rain.

Does it matter whether the rain, and Lizzie's Cinderella transformation are probable? The people are real, even ordinary, if the circumstances are romantic and sentimental. Their lives, their cares, their joys grow in importance until the spectator becomes an emotional participant. The humour is simple and homely enough to be part of a family joke. It is, all told, a play to enjoy, as a Christmas tree is enjoyed for its fairy-tale associations.

Richard Nash wrote one popular play and one controversial play before he produced *The Rainmaker*. The first was *The Young and Fair*; the second, *See the Jaguar*. *The Rainmaker* opened on Broadway in October, 1954, at the Cort Theatre, with Geraldine Page as Lizzie. Last summer, it proved both successful and popular at Brae Manor, in Knowlton, and at Joy Thompson's Tent Theatre, at Mont Gabriel. MRT's production will be directed by Ramer Henry, who was responsible for *The Time of the Cuckoo* last season.

— Beatrice Munro Brown



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T H E O L D V I C



Paul Rogers in *Macbeth*

Montreal had to wait many years for a visit by the Old Vic theatrical company, by common consent the best all-round repertory organization in England for many years, and in particular the principal body devoted to the interpretation of the plays of Shakespeare for forty years. It is the ambition of every actor and actress in the Old Country to be associated with the Old Vic in some Shakespearean production. It aims at the highest standard of acting, and it gives to its players a cachet no other company can bestow.

For its present North American tour the repertoire consists of *Romeo and Juliet*, the best beloved romantic drama Shakespeare wrote; *Macbeth*, which shares with *Hamlet* the eminence of being his greatest tragedy, and *Richard II*, the key drama to his long list of English historical plays. A better selection could hardly have been made. All three have been played at the St. Denis theatre with real distinction, have been reviewed with equal distinction by both English and French critics, and have won the acclaim of enthusiastic audiences which was thoroughly well deserved.

I have been asked to discuss in the pages of *Cue*, the MRT's official magazine, the outstanding features of the week's performances, — a week without parallel in the story of the English-speaking theatre in Montreal.

* * *

Romeo and Juliet has always attracted outstanding actors and actresses. In the course of more than sixty years' experience as a drama critic, I have memories of many of them who appeared together in the respective roles of Shakespeare's famous lovers, — Irving and Terry, Forbes-Robertson and Helena Modjeska, William Terris and Mary Anderson, Lewis Waller and Evelyn Millard, Forbes-Robertson and Mrs. Pat Campbell, and Sothorn and Marlowe, all notable artistes who left great reputations that live in theatrical history. The Old Vic productions we saw last week were remarkable for some qualities that have unfortunately been missing from most of the Shakespearean performances Montreal has witnessed in the past. First, the Shakespearean line was spoken with due regard for its poetry, and clarity of speech was always in evidence; every syllable was given its proper cadence and due significance.

By

S. MORGAN-POWELL

This has been the outstanding feature in every play presented; all the company can speak the Shakespearean line, from the leading characters to the most minor, whereas in the majority of the Shakespearean plays hitherto given here, with the notable exception of those presented by Sothorn and Marlowe, the supporting cast just recited their lines, more or less as schoolboys do. There was no recitation in the Old Vic performances. And what a splendid example the principals set their support.

* * *

Claire Bloom not only created a notable illusion of youth, but she expressed the very spirit of romance, and lent added beauty to Shakespeare's lovely lyric verse, which lived anew in the listener's ear. John Neville gave us a Romeo touched with a slight reserve which no more than kept in check the adoring lover whose splendid voice held a wealth of worship.

Fine stage portraits were those of the Nurse, a warmly devoted and intensely human study, by Wynne Clark; Paul Rogers' Mercutio, brilliant in flashing wit and repartee, and Charles Gray as the Prince of Verona.

* * *

Macbeth undoubtedly made the greatest impression of the three plays the Old Vic gave. The reason is not far to seek. It was the most important; it made the greatest demands upon the company's astonishing resources; and in its atmospheric qualities it was the most arresting.

The last productions of *Macbeth* here were those of Michael Redgrave and Donald Wolfit. The latter was characteristic of Mr. Wolfit's repertoire, — a sincere and largely competent effort to present the great tragedy, and, within its inevitable limitations, well worth seeing. Mr. Redgrave gave a much more ambitious production, scenically one of the finest North America has ever seen. The setting was on heroic lines, — the vast hall of Glamis castle with an arched roof of grim splendour, and the magnificent soaring pile of the castle exterior.

The Old Vic, for touring purposes, is content with a unit setting which lends itself admirably to the requirements of

the drama. Much has been said about the lighting. My own impression is that the producer, Michael Benthall, has had in mind a lighting plot that will suggest medieval times in its dark spaces and its dim, shadowed arches and battlement outlines, which conjured up a definite atmosphere both sinister and foreboding. In this setting the story was told with tremendous power. From the beginning the very air seemed laden with tragedy.

* * *

I have seen no Lady Macbeth who so dominates the scenes in which she appears as does Coral Browne in carriage, voice and the amazing suggestion of evil intent and design. Here was acting that fascinated, thrilled, and held her audience spellbound. "An impression of majestic evil," says the drama critic of the London Times. I would go even farther, and say, "the sweeping personification of the spirit of evil, intense and irresistible."

She rises to great heights. The Sleepwalking Scene is one in which Ellen Terry and Pat Campbell scored triumphs that lived after them. Coral Browne will here stand comparison with those famous

(continued on page 11)



John Neville and
Claire Bloom in
Romeo and Juliet

PRODUCTION STAFF

STAGE MANAGER: John Trenaman
COSTUME CO-ORDINATOR: Gerald Budner
WARDROBE MISTRESS: Lydia Randolph

PROPERTIES MISTRESS: Marguerite Priddey
MAKE-UP: Catharine Bensley - Edward Wilson

FRONT OF HOUSE
MANAGER: Ranulph Hudston
HOSTESS: Viola Esdon

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ABOUT THE CAST

JOHN HEMPSTEAD (*Thomas Mendip*) is one of the busiest young actors in Montreal. He has just returned from a season of seven productions at North Hatley; is heard regularly on CBC-Radio, and was also seen in Kafka's *The Trial*, in the TNM and CBC-Folio productions, and in the *Dateline* series. He appeared regularly with Grosvenor Productions and the Everyman Players, and with MRT in *When We Are Married* and *The Apple Cart*.

JOAN WATTS (*Jennet Jourdemayne*) is a native Montrealer who studied drama in Toronto, appeared at Brae Manor a few years ago, then with the CRT and Kingston's International Players. She spent two years at the Stratford Shakespearean Festival where she understudied Frances Hyland's *Portia*. This summer she was featured at the Mountain Playhouse.

JACK CURRAN (*Richard*) is new to MRT, but has been seen here with Trinity Players, the Mountain Playhouse and Script Theatre. A Maritimer, he acted in Saint John, N.B. and Halifax, and on Montreal TV.

DIANA FISH (*Alizon*) last appeared with MRT in *The Devil's Disciple*. She will be remembered as Cecily in Grosvenor Productions' *The Importance of Being Earnest*, has worked with Lachine and Everyman Players, and spent a summer at the Stratford Shakespearean Festival.

LOUIS CUSSON (*Nicholas*) is a newcomer to MRT, first seen locally when he appeared at the Drama Festival in Sherbrooke with the St. Boniface Cercle Moliere. A Winnipeg actor, he played *The Golden Boy* at the University of Manitoba, and was also active with the Winnipeg Little Theatre and with Mrs. Peg Green's noted Actors' Guild. He spent this summer at North Hatley.

KAY TREMBLAY (*Margaret*) played the delightful Annie Parker in MRT's *When We Are Married* a year ago. She studied ballet with the Old Vic and Sadlers Wells, drama at RADA; toured Britain and Europe, and appeared in musical comedy in London's West End. This summer her own stage activities took a back seat to those of her two small sons, busy with the children's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* on TV, and the *York Mystery Plays* for the NFB.

EARL PENNINGTON (*Humphrey*) returns to the MRT stage after an absence of more than ten years, making his last appearance here in *Junior Miss*. Well-known on radio, he was featured in the McGill Conservatory production of *The Beggar's Opera*, and was seen with Grosvenor Productions, notably in *The Strike*.

ALFRED GALLAGHER (*Hebble Tyson*) has contributed many fine performances to MRT in his twelve years' association with the theatre. Though his last "official" appearance here was in *Home at Seven*, he played Stogumber in the Montreal Festivals' *Saint Joan*. He was featured in *Montserrat* and *The Trial* with TNM; has been seen in several TV productions, and has been playing in the famous radio serial, *Laura Ltd.* for the past nine years.

PETER SYMCOX (*The Chaplain*) is known both as actor with MRT, Grosvenor Productions and the Mountain Playhouse, and as designer. He had experience in both theatrical activities at Oxford, with the OUDS, the Oxford festival and the Playhouse. He won a scholarship to the Old Vic Theatre School, and has worked for Tennent, for Sadlers' Wells and in France before coming to Montreal.

RAMER HENRY (*Tappercoom*) is an actor who needs as little introduction to MRT as he does to Montreal. A noted CBC actor and narrator, he has appeared on local stages in a number of MRT plays, with Grosvenor Productions, and in TNM's *Montserrat* and *The Trial*. This season he directed *The Time of the Cuckoo* for MRT, and will also direct the forthcoming production of *The Rainmaker*.

WALTER WAKEFIELD (*Skipps*) is another actor familiar both to MRT audiences and to the whole Montreal theatrical scene for a number of years. He has contributed countless characterizations, among which MRT audiences will remember particularly fondly his English Soldier in *Saint Joan*.

A NEW DIRECTOR

JULIA MURPHY comes to MRT with wide experience in many fields of Canadian theatre. Prominent for many years with the Ottawa Little Theatre, she was responsible for the forming of the very successful children's theatre, The Saturday Players in Ottawa, a group which formed the nucleus for a professional season in Sarnia. She has directed for Ottawa's CRT and Toronto's Crest, and has just finished directing her first film for the NFB.

The Montreal Repertory Theatre

presents

THE LADY'S NOT FOR BURNING

by CHRISTOPHER FRY

Directed by JULIA MURPHY

Setting by ARTHUR VORONKA

THE PLAYERS

(in order of their appearance)

RICHARD, an orphaned clerk	JACK CURRAN
THOMAS MENDIP, a discharged soldier	JOHN HEMPSTEAD
ALIZON ELIOT	DIANA FISH
NICHOLAS DEVIZE	LOUIS CUSSON
MARGARET DEVIZE, mother of Nicholas	KAY TREMBLAY
HUMPHREY DEVIZE, brother of Nicholas	EARL PENNINGTON
HEBBLE TYSON, the Mayor	ALFRED GALLAGHER
JENNET JOURDEMAYNE	JOAN WATTS
THE CHAPLAIN	PETER SYMCOX
EDWARD TAPPERCOOM, a Justice	RAMER HENRY
MATTHEW SKIPPS	WALTER WAKEFIELD

For notes on the players see facing page

ACT ONE : A room in the house of HEBBLE TYSON, Mayor of the small market-town of Cool Clary.

Time: 1400 either more or less or exactly.

ACT TWO : The same room, about an hour later.

ACT THREE: Later the same night.

There will be two intervals of ten minutes each.

'In the past I wanted to be hung. It was worth while being hung to be a hero, seeing that life was not really worth living.'

A convict who confessed falsely to a murder, February 1947

VAN HORNE AUDITORIUM . . . OCTOBER 17-20, 24-27, 1956

CUE for October, 1956 9

Christopher Fry is so surprising and refreshing a weaver of spells in the theatre that it is a stunning shock to learn that in 1935 he was the librettist for a poor forgotten frivol called *She Shall Have Music*. During his years of military service, 1940-1946, Fry amiably joined in his regiment's "khaki concerts" as tap-dancer, stage manager and writer of songs. In 1950, in a halo of controversy and adulation, four Fry plays were concurrently filling four major London theatres.

In a few years, Fry had achieved the miraculous position of a renowned and popular playwright whose idiom was modern poetic drama. The first play which established Fry as a writer for all, and not the cherished darling of a few, was *The Lady's Not for Burning*.

The Arts Theatre Club first presented *The Lady* in 1948, with Alec Clunes and Sheila Manahan in the leading roles. The audience, according to J. C. Trewin, eminent British drama critic, "left the Arts delighted with what they had heard."

It was Sir John Gielgud, however, who flung Fry down in the teeth of West End theatrical commercialism by reviving the play at the Globe Theatre in 1949. Gielgud himself directed and played the

leading role of Thomas Mendip; Pamela Brown was The Lady, and the cast was a grand slam of notables: Richard Burton, Claire Bloom, Harcourt Williams and Esme Percy among others. The play ran for nine happy months. It was this production which came to America to astonish Broadway.

The Lady's Not for Burning is the tale of "a man who wants to be hanged and a woman, accused of supernatural soliciting, who does not want to be burned". Under a sparkling cloak of poetic imagery, through which pierce the poet's sword-thrusts of gusty wit and volatile humour, is the substance of Fry's earnest concern with the purpose of our being. Through the play runs Fry's own Artesian well of astonishment at the miracle of life, the mystery of the universe. The airy gaiety of his dialogue is continually warmed by a sense of the ecstasy in living and the permanence of loving.

The tussle between disillusionment and the wonder of creation, between a man to be hanged and a woman to be burned, and the quirkish, ridiculous, sentimental sub-plot of a tremulous young girl, her fiancé, her fiancé's brother and the man she falls in love with, all take place in a little English market-town "1400 either more or less or exactly."

Interest . . .

To know when one's self is interested is the first condition of interesting other people.

— Walter Pater.

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THE OLD VIC . . . (continued from page 7)

actresses. From the moment when she walked on to the stage, herself under a spell, and knelt down to recall the meeting with Macbeth after he had committed the murder of King Duncan, the vast audience sat tense, in utter silence. It was one of those moments of the theatre one never forgets.

Paul Rogers was a splendid Macbeth. There is at the outset no suggestion of greatness; that comes later. Mr. Rogers paints a picture of the slow disintegration of a human soul, under the influence and domination of a far stronger will than his, that is at all times compelling. Surely no actor of today could have visualised the working of remorse in the human mind with such terrible agony. There were moments of dramatic beauty, too, in which he spoke, — never as passages of fine rhetoric, — but as the incomparable poetry they are, — those moving soliloquies that reveal a fine mind brought to the verge of madness.

* * *

Richard II, the third play given by the Old Vic, is seldom played save when the series of English historical dramas is being presented by a Company devoted to Shakespeare, being, as I have mentioned, the key of that series. Yet, it is a complete drama in itself, a moving tragedy, containing, in addition to a study of the complex character of the king himself, many gripping situations and some of the finest of Shakespeare's poetry.

King Richard is a difficult character to make convincing on the stage, full of contradictions; and for that reason it challenges the actor's artistic resources to a degree. We were fortunate in being able to see such a masterly and revealing portrait as John Neville gave, after having watched him in such an utterly different role as that of Romeo. Weak-willed, incapable of any sustained action

as a King, possessing many characteristics evocative of contempt, Shakespeare makes him a king who none the less commands our sympathy because he is so human.

* * *

Mr. Neville never loses his grip either of Richard's inherent weaknesses or likable qualities. Physically the study is one that holds our interest; and Mr. Neville's poetic sense never fails him. Add to this his ability to make Richard's contrariness plausible, if only for the duration of the play, and you have a chapter of history you will not easily forget.

There are, as I have said, many passages in this tragedy which Richard speaks in a manner that enables you to realise what a wealth of lyric charm Shakespeare's poetry holds. As Mr. Neville utters them, you sit back thrilled with every syllable. And not all the fine passages are given to Richard. It is very, very seldom one hears that splendid tribute to England, spoken by John of Gaunt (Paul Rogers) on his deathbed, and beginning

"This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle . . ."

delivered so movingly.

This was magnificent dramatic utterance, worth going a very long way to hear alone.

The supporting cast included several distinguished character-studies. Altogether they made up a memorable picture of mediaeval England.

* * *

I must pay a special tribute to the entire company for their admirable diction. These actors and actresses know their Shakespeare, and how to speak his poetry with feeling and with grace, and always with complete understanding.

Atmospherically, the Old Vic productions have not been equalled by any other theatrical company seen in Canada since the twentieth century dawned.



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PLAN A THEATRE NIGHT

This season MRT will have two "open" nights during the run of each play, Monday and Tuesday of the productions' second weeks. These nights will be available to group parties wishing to sponsor a special performance.

MRT has arranged with Canadian Theatre Tours Reg'd. to assist any local club or group interested in sponsoring such a Theatre Night as a fund-raising project. For full information on "How to raise funds painlessly" telephone Terence Fisher, Managing Director of Canadian Theatre Tours, Reg'd. at UN. 1-5300.

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Directed by Ramer Henry

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The comedy will be directed by Robert Verniks. Place and date to be announced later.

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Most of the backstage volunteers work for one or two plays in a year, or for all plays for one or two years. Catherine Bensley and Edward Wilson are so much a part of MRT's regular production routine that they are taken for granted. MRT owns some flats and some lighting equipment, some costumes and properties and a sewing machine, some furniture,

Kay Bensley and Ed Wilson.

Theirs is the labour of converting the face of each player to a stage character. To do this they arrive early and work hard, under pressure, every night of every production. They do not step on the stage and glow with the satisfaction of creative achievement. They do not step off the stage to a round of applause. Hardly anyone even notices their names in the programme. They work, receive nothing, and ask for nothing.

Both Catherine Bensley and Edward Wilson have played for MRT a number of times. For this we do not offer them our thanks, because we believe acting is rewarding. We do feel, however, that thanks and applause are due to both these valued and conscientious MRT regulars for their continuing roles of MRT's make-up experts.

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