"67 and Still Kickin’

The Quiet Revolution and Montreal Anglophone Theatre

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BACKGROUND

Major closures at the beginning of the 1960s led to concerns for the survival of anglophone theatre, concerns which were heightened by the significant socio-cultural changes in Quebec brought about by the Quiet Revolution (c. 1960–c. 1966). The national emergence of regional theatres, beginning with Manitoba’s regional theatre in 1957, also meant large houses, like Stratford (1953) and Shaw (1962), began luring theatre professionals away from Montreal’s smaller, independent companies. What saved Montreal anglophone theatre?

‘60

North Hatley Playhouse (last professional anglophone theatre) closes.

‘61

Montreal Repertory Theatre closes in February. The Mountain Playhouse closes after their final summer season.

‘64

Semi-professional English work only extant at La Poudrière, a multilingual house on Ile St. Helene.

First Playwrights’ Festival gives visibility to domestic writers. In its first year, PWM produces 14 works (primarily staged readings).

La Poudrière produces six plays in English.

NDT graduating classes begin tradition of public performances at the Monument National.

Cafe Andre is a new venue for small, revue-type performances.

NEWLY FORMED NEGRO THEATRE

The Centaur would open in 1969 with help from the Conseil des arts de Montréal. It continues to serve as Montreal’s anglophone regional theatre.

Expo ’67 rejuvenates theatre in both languages by infusing it with international influences. Notable anglo-Jewish Montreal producer Sam Gesser organized the entertainment for the Canadian Pavilion.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Anglophone theatre suffered during the Quiet Revolution, but it was never snuffed out. In fact, the Quiet Revolution was a primary motivator for anglophone Montrealers to “get creative.” By expanding networks (Yiddish Theatre, Negro Arts Guild, La Poudrière), sourcing innovative spaces (Westmount Baptist Church, Café Andre), and educating new artists (NTS, PWM), anglophone creators finally broke with some of the NYC tradition of public performances bringing about by the Quiet Revolution (c. 1960–c. 1966). The national emergence of regional theatres, beginning with Manitoba’s regional theatre in 1957, also meant large houses, like Stratford (1953) and Shaw (1962), began luring theatre professionals away from Montreal’s smaller, independent companies. What saved Montreal anglophone theatre?

KEY

= Training

= Diversity

= New Spaces

WORKS CITED


The 47th Festival of the National Theatre School, ARIA McGill, & AIO McGill


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METHODOLOGY

This data was taken from archival research done by myself and Sofia Cultor, covering both the Montreal Gazette and the Montreal Star.

SYMPATHY

Montrealers were destined for bilingualism and diversity.

NOTABLE

La Poudrière and Instantheatre both receive funding.

La Poudrière produces six plays in English.

Yiddish Theatre Group moves into Gesu Theatre, a 900 seat house. Produces three works.

NTS graduating classes begin tradition of public performances at the Monument National.

Café Andre is a new venue for small, revue-type performances.

Newly formed Negro Theatre Arts Club mounts Little Tropics by Ambra Tott at Union United Church.

Instantheatre mounts 17 plays, including one new work: The Partition by Jacques Languirand.

ddf provides opportunities to new production companies:

- Pendulum Productions – Maurice By Jack Cunningham, an original Canadian play
- YMCA Little Theatre – Fao and Sympathy by Robert Anderson.

Revue founded by African American choreographer Releigh Peterson.

PWM produces 18 more plays amidst pleas for strong Canadian playwrights.

Instantheatre performs 13 shows, including a new script by Aviva Ravel.

BACKGROUND

The Yiddish Theatre Group becomes a non-profit, and reaches out to NTS and other non-Jewish organizations. It will affiliate with the Saidye Bronfman Centre (SBC) in 1968.

Inaugural year of SBC, later, The Segal Centre.

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