

"Bertrand Russell's guided tour of intellectual rubbish"

The Royal Alexandra is a splendid theatre in the grand Edwardian style; by far the best preserved and most elegant of its kind in North America. Toronto is particularly well-endowed with good theatres: the O'Keefe Centre, where despite its cavernous proportions Olivier played *The Dance of Death* and so contained the play and the audience by his performance that the vast auditorium vanished and all seemed to be one in intimate communion as Olivier wove his performance in and out of the universal drama of that sometime librarian Strindberg.

The St. Lawrence Theatre is another one that is as good as its kind as any in London or New York. It was a sensation more than an experience to watch Hume Cronyn perform *Krapp's Last Tape* there recently

and to listen to his wife Jessica Tandy babble the inspired pelting nonsense of *Not I*. The programme referred to the fact that nearby McMaster University had one of the great collections of Beckett's work, certainly one of the best in Canada. Besides these three traditional theatres Toronto is honeycombed with little, off-Yonge St., theatres that offer such an abundance of plays, dance, mime, music of all kinds that there are too many to take in. Few cities are so fortunate. One of the best of them, for example, is housed in the Toronto Public Library.

But of all it is the Royal Alex that has the heart. Even the red plush of the seats, the velvet guide ropes, the brass all sparkling yet redolent, are a setting themselves and so are the audience, who crowd up buying tickets for drinks at Intermission, some disappearing into the Ladies Drawing Room and Lounge, nearly all knowing one another, look-alikes, the old-fashioned theatre-going public. They pay \$15 for a ticket if it is to see Lauren Bacall....

There in September there was a tatty road show of *The Student Prince* which, despite a blistering review in the *Globe and Mail*, turned the patrons on. They loved it. It was a down-at-heels, shabby production saved from complete mediocrity by Ray Walston playing the prince's valet, Lutz, and most of all by Robert Rounseville who played the tutor, Herr Doktor Engel. The tutor died all too soon in the play; the valet had little or nothing to do, but while they were on stage the theatre became alive. Reading Rounseville's potted biography in the programme, his successful and varied stage appearances, it became evident that the man was advancing from strength to strength, that probably the crown of his career lay still ahead of him, for, in the Spring of 1974, he is going to essay a one-man show: *Bertrand Russell's Guided Tour of Intellectual Rubbish*. Sandwiched between then and now is to be a musical version of *Volpone*, directed by Michael Egan.

Robert Rounseville came down to see the Russell Collection over the weekend - *The Student Prince* was being presented at the Royal Alex for a fortnight. He was an actor *par excellence* in his style, attire and everything about him. He was wearing a cream-coloured suit - and it was past Labour Day! - with the coat of arms of the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg emblazoned on the breast pocket, and a German student corps peaked cap that he had worn when he had performed the lead in *The Student Prince* some years ago. He knew of the Russell Archives, had brought the script of his one-man show with him, and the *intermezzo* of a sunny Sunday afternoon with him in the Russell Archives was one of the most pleasant and rewarding couple of hours that I have spent in that place. We were even able to help him, with the gift of some posters and the playing of some tape recordings. A picture of Rounseville as Russell was remarkable; this bearded, exuberant, and talented man bore an uncanny likeness to the original, though it is not his intention merely to facsimile Russell.

Rounseville left a copy of the script in the Archives after swearing Blackwell and me to a fast embargo on it until production takes place, or the writer, Marvin Kaye, approves of the public dipping into it. But reading the script wouldn't be the point. Rounseville and Kaye are not creating an audio-visual *Bertrand Russell's Best*. They are dramatizing Russell's mission in his writings against irrationalism in religion, morals, science, education and politics. There will be plenty of wit to boot, so the messianic scenes will not seem fanatical, as indeed Russell was not. By the next issue of the *Russell* magazine, we will be able to pass on information for booking the show - it already has the rare imprimatur of the Russell authorities in Britain. Meanwhile we are putting the Archives at the disposal of Messrs. Rounseville and Kaye. If you see their Bertrand Russell speaking instead of writing out logical formulæ - "E shriek" for E!, for example - you will know whence came this added touch of authenticity.

Mills Memorial Library
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