



full justice, this should be extended to read *functional but inviting and spectacularly successful*.

There was, of course, an English language theatre in Montreal before Centaur... particularly *Her Majesty's* (demolished 1962), a touring house which for more than half a century provided a showcase for London and New York imports. The Canadian Centennial generated a nationwide surge of theatre building and in Montreal this produced the multi-auditorium *Place des Arts* — an uneasy compromise between American performance architecture (formal even

Anne Butler, Maurice Podbrey & Alex Diakun in Athol Fugard's latest play *A Lesson from Aloes*, directed by the author. The first performances outside South Africa were given in Montreal at the Centaur Theatre in January 1980.

Simon, Stoppard, Strindberg, Williams, Yeats. Most of them contributed more than one play: clearly the language may be English but the scope is international.

There are two theatres in the Centaur complex. Centaur 2 came first followed by the larger Centaur 1. Both are in what might be called the *Mermaid* tradition — rectangles with steeply raked seating facing an end stage. Very functional and rather heavy going for both actor/audience and for audience/audience relationships. A

mecca for seekers after purity of sightline and those who like to retain an objective detachment from the play.

Good lighting bridges and a control board which indicates the mixture of English and United States practice that is incorporated in Canadian lighting techniques... a Strand S.P. with six presets.

The bar/exhibition space is functional but inviting. Indeed *functional but inviting* might well form an accurate capsule description for Centaur. Although, to do

pompous) and French performing arts (informal even casual).

(*aside* — it is interesting, is it not, that time seems to have produced something of a reversal in French and American attitudes to the role of formality in the arts.)

Place des Arts — as its name suggests — houses a mixed programme. The two main auditoria are quasi-opera-houses used for concerts of every possible musical style, together with some opera, dance and musicals, most of the latter being short stay bus-and-truck tours. There is a playhouse within the complex but much of the gut-drama seems to arise elsewhere in the City. *Place des Arts* is essentially French... to the extent that, in a city where graphics are ostentatiously bilingual, all posters and labels are totally French. However a bilingual poster appeared this spring: the Centaur Company were in residence in one of the larger Place des Arts auditoria with *Balconville* described as a bilingual play (une pièce bilingue).

The future? Hear the words of the Quebecois Minister of State for Cultural Development...

'Primarily a French-speaking society, Quebec must discover a source of vitality in its minorities... any society that helps its minority groups to preserve their cultural heritage reaps a cultural reward and achieves a better balance. This could and should be the case for Quebec... Centaur's programmes are varied; its professional status exceptional. Never stilted by an over-emphasis on the classics, it has always been prepared to embark on the new and innovative. Although appealing mainly to Anglophone audiences, it is now enjoying the increasing interest of French-speaking Quebecers... In the Quebec of tomorrow, the Centaur has its place. It is a necessary contribution to Quebec's culture. In the name of my government I wish it every success.'

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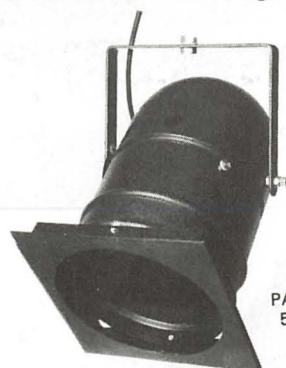


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