

**BROADWAY NORTH:
MUSICAL THEATRE IN MONTREAL IN THE 1920s**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the professional musical stage of Montreal in the decade following the First World War. Throughout the 1920s, almost all of the city's musical theatre attractions were foreign in origin, and were staged by American, French, and British roadshow companies, arriving mainly from New York City. Analysis of Montreal's musical theatre entertainment and satellite relationship with Broadway highlights the growing cultural influence of the United States upon Quebec society in the interwar period. As a northern outpost of Broadway, Montreal was directly affected by the profound transformation of the entertainment industry of the United States. After peaking in the second half of the decade, the musical stage of Montreal was gradually supplanted by the decline of the roadshow system, the advent of the sound film, the onset of the Great Depression, and the resurgence of local stock theatre companies.

The northern extension of Broadway into Montreal heightened divisions within Montreal society between a growing middle class of businessmen, managers, and other professionals who embraced modernity and cultural change, and more conservative forces who favoured the traditional Quebec based on religious and nationalist values. While the musical attractions sent northwards from Broadway were a popular divertissement for a large proportion of Montrealers from all social classes and linguistic backgrounds, they were abhorred by the province's clerical and nationalist elites and their supporters who regarded them as a threat to the survival of traditional French Canadian values and culture.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse traite de l'histoire du théâtre lyrique professionnel à Montréal entre août 1920 et la fin de la saison 1929-1930. Au cours de cette décennie, presque toutes les attractions musicales montées dans la métropole étaient d'origine étrangère, présentées en tournée par des entreprises américaines, françaises, ou anglaises, majoritairement après avoir tenu l'affiche dans les théâtres de la ville de New-York. Un examen détaillé du rôle satellitaire que jouait Montréal vis-à-vis Broadway met en lumière l'influence croissante qu'exerçaient les États-Unis sur la culture et la société québécoise de l'entre-deux-guerres. Comme succursale du Broadway, Montréal fut directement touché par les transformations profondes dans l'industrie du divertissement américain. Après avoir atteint son apogée pendant la seconde moitié des années '20, le théâtre lyrique à Montréal s'approchait de son éclipse à laquelle allaient contribuer la venue du cinéma parlant, les débuts de la Grande Dépression, et la renaissance de groupes théâtraux locaux, qui diminuèrent fortement la venue de ces tournées.

L'expansion de Broadway vers le nord vit s'accroître des désaccords profonds entre, d'une part une classe moyenne formée en grande partie d'hommes d'affaires, d'entrepreneurs, et de membres des professions libérales, dédiés au modernisme et au progrès culturel et, de l'autre, les éléments plutôt conservateurs qui épousaient la cause d'un Québec traditionnel favorisant les vertus et les valeurs religieuses et nationalistes. Les attractions musicales que dirigeaient vers Montréal les imprésarios de Broadway constituaient un genre de divertissement fort bien accueilli par une clientèle urbaine formant un échantillon représentatif du public, sans égard à la position sociale ni aux préférences linguistiques. Par contre, les élites cléricales et nationalistes craignaient ces mêmes présentations, traitées comme de sérieuses menaces à la continuité des valeurs et des principes nécessaires à la survivance de la culture Canadienne-française.

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INTRODUCTION

Of recent years, the analysis of cultural activity has gained considerable ground in the field of historical writing because it offers a powerful lens through which to examine the constitution, climate of opinion, and operations of a particular society. Maria Tippett, for instance, has emphasised that cultural history requires not only a close examination of different examples of cultural presentation, but also an insightful consideration of the economic, social, and political context of the society in which cultural expression flourished.¹ Inspired by this broad orientation, the present dissertation explores the relationship between professional musical theatre and Montreal society in the decade after the First World War. The social and economic history of the metropolis during the early years of the Taschereau administration is illuminated by a scrutiny of the foreign productions that passed across the musical stage of Montreal, and the cultural climate in which they flourished. Through a close analysis of the lyric theatre we can see the development and consolidation of a modern urban industrial society, whose increasing demands for diversion and entertainment provided a thriving market for commercial musical theatre and competing forms of recreation. Contributing to the success of the theatrical offerings were the expanding powers of the print media, which publicised attractions and guided public taste.

¹Maria Tippett, "The Writing of English-Canadian Cultural History, 1970-85," Canadian Historical Review, Volume 67 (1986), pp.548-561.

This thesis discusses the competition in the city among American, French and British cultural influences as well as the divergent political and ideological orientations in the province, and the entrenched power of the Roman Catholic Church. It examines Montreal's francophone and anglophone communities in the 1920s, and finds them to be open and mutually tolerant, contrary to the popular interpretation. This study also demonstrates the growing mechanisation of culture as seen through the rise in popularity of the cinema, with the development of the sound motion picture and radio, and considers the effects of the Great Depression on these cultural expressions. Montreal's vigorous musical stage of the period thus provides a unique insight into the cultural infrastructure of a modern urban industrial society, receptive to foreign influences, particularly from the United States.

Over the last few decades, scholarly research in the United States and Canada has focused increasingly on the cultural transformation of North American society in the period 1890 to 1930. In an attempt to shed new light on the shift from middle-class Victorian elitist gentility to the new mass culture of the early twentieth century, social historians have examined various forms of commercial recreation, including amusement parks, professional sports, vaudeville, cabaret nightlife, the cinema, and musical theatre.

In order to comprehend the emergence of the new mass entertainment of the early twentieth century, it is necessary to outline the nature of the Gilded Age culture which prevailed in the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century. This culture was the prerogative of America's moneyed, leisured and educated middle and upper classes, mainly Anglo-Saxon and Protestant in background. One study has

described it as "more thoroughly 'Victorian' than the England over which Victoria reigned."² In Rebellion Against Victorianism, Stanley Coben underlines the point that Victorian culture was genteel and elitist, and based on a strict code of social behaviour, whose traditional virtues included industriousness, piety, and self-control.³ Victorian cultural elites believed that leisure should be as constructive as work, and promoted libraries, museums, art galleries and scientific fairs. In the Incorporation of America Alan Trachtenberg argues that the 1893 Chicago World's Fair was a capitalistic extravaganza organised by Victorian cultural elites and businessmen to promote an exclusionist corporate vision of America.⁴ Closer to home, Keith Walden's recently published Becoming Modern in Toronto: The Industrial Exhibition and the Shaping of a Late Victorian Culture demonstrates that the Toronto Industrial Exhibition (1879-1903) was also an expression of industrial capitalist leadership and elite Victorian culture.⁵

Despite its unwavering support from the Protestant social establishment of the industrial North-Eastern United States, the Victorian cultural order began to decline in the late nineteenth century. Its demise was hastened by the rise of a new entrepreneurial financial establishment which saw the swelling urban populations of the continent as

²John Kasson, Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century, (New York, Hill & Wong, 1978), p.4.

³Stanley Coben, Rebellion Against Victorianism: The Impetus For Cultural Change in 1920s America, (New York City: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp.3-4.

⁴Alan Trachtenberg, The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age (New York, Hill & Wong, 1982), pp.214-231.

⁵Keith Walden, Becoming Modern In Toronto: The Industrial Exhibition and the Shaping of a Late Victorian Culture, (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1997).

lucrative markets for the commercialisation of amusement.⁶ In his Culture as History Warren Susman argues that American society in the opening decades of the twentieth century underwent a radical transformation in which the traditional Puritan ethic was replaced by a new social order dominated by a social class of technocrats dedicated to the promotion of a culture of abundance.⁷ As disposable income and leisure time increased, and public transportation and communications improved, a new urban popular culture was born, and emerged in the form of amusement parks, baseball leagues, vaudeville, cabaret nightlife, the cinema and musical theatre.

The new popular culture found one of its earliest forms of expression in the amusement parks that continued in permanent form the attractions of the fairground, the midway and the industrial exhibition. These recreational centres sprang up across the United States, and hastened the breakdown of cultural and social class barriers and the democratisation of entertainment. John Kasson's Amusing the Million analyses the various forms of recreation and amusement offered on Coney Island, and illustrates how this revolutionary new urban and egalitarian entertainment helped to undermine the existing Victorian genteel cultural order, and constituted "a harbinger of the new mass culture" that followed.⁸

⁶Kasson, pp.5-6.

⁷Warren Susman, Culture As History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century, (New York, Pantheon Books, 1984).

⁸Kasson, p. 112.

The advent of the amusement park in the new urban industrial landscape has also received some attention from Canadian scholars. In Le Parc Sohmer de Montréal, Yvan Lamonde and Raymond Montpetit explore the wide variety of modern entertainments once available at Parc Sohmer, a popular American-style open air amusement park which flourished in east-end Montreal in the period 1889-1919.⁹ The two researchers demonstrate that Sohmer Park, like Coney Island, was a capitalistic commercial venture, which catered to a mainly urban industrial working-class clientele, in search of affordable diversion. They also illustrate how the amusement park aroused the wrath of religious leaders, both Protestant and Catholic, who failed to secure the suspension of the park's recreational activities on Sundays, "la journée du Seigneur."¹⁰

Vancouver's Stanley Park has also been used as a research subject to investigate social attitudes towards leisure.¹¹ Robert MacDonald's article indicates that while Vancouver's social elite held romantic views of the park, and opposed its commercial development, the city's reform-minded middle class and leisure-hungry working-class majority favoured a more functional and utilitarian role for the site.

Early twentieth-century professional sports, such as baseball, were another form of urban popular culture which appealed to thousands of North Americans across ethnic.

⁹Yvan Lamonde & Raymond Montpetit, Le Parc Sohmer de Montréal, 1889-1919: Un Lieu Populaire de culture urbaine, (Québec, Institut Québécois de Recherche sur la culture, 1986).

¹⁰Ibid., pp.211-212.

¹¹Robert MacDonald, " 'Holy Retreat' or 'Practical Breathing Spot'? Class Perceptions of Vancouver's Stanley Park, 1910- 1913," Canadian Historical Review, Vol. 65 (June 1984), pp.127-153.

religious, class, gender, and generational lines. William Baker's Sports in the Western World concentrates on the various factors which made possible the rise of professional sports in early twentieth-century America.¹² Baker argues that demographic growth, the shorter workweek and rising wages were all critical to the development of mass urban culture. Equally important were such technological advances as the widespread supply of electricity, which transformed night into day; subway trains and buses, which transported spectators to new concrete and steel stadiums, and radio, which advertised and transmitted commentary on baseball events to millions.

The rise and commercialisation of baseball is explored in Steven Riess's now classic Touching Base: Professional Baseball and American Culture in the Progressive Era.¹³ By the First World War, Riess argues, "baseball was America's secular religion."¹⁴ Alongside films and radio, baseball remained throughout the 1920s a leading American pastime which literally "touched base" with most Americans. Bruce Kuklick's To Everything a Season explores the role played by Philadelphia's Shibe Stadium in the commercialisation of twentieth-century baseball. While tens of thousands enjoyed baseball at Shibe Park, the stadium was exploited by financial elites like any other business project.¹⁵ Kuklick also argues that Shibe Park was far more than a commercial

¹²William Baker, Sports in the Western World, (Totowa, N.J., Rowman & Littlefield, 1982).

¹³Steven Riess, Touching Base: Professional Baseball and American Culture in the Progressive Era (Westport, Greenwood Press, 1980).

¹⁴Riess, p.143.

¹⁵Bruce Kuklick, To Everything a Season: Shibe Park and Uroan Philadelphia, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1991), p.122.

venture, and served equally as "a unifying force" which gave Philadelphians a strong sense of commonality and community.

The development of organised sport in Canada has been the focal point of a number of works, including Alan Metcalfe's pioneer study Canada Learns to Play.¹⁶ Like his American counterparts, Metcalfe regards the development of organised sport as an integral part of Canadian social history. He traces the transformation of such indigenous Canadian sports as lacrosse, hockey and football from the amateur pastimes of the British-Protestant middle class into mass culture "available to all levels of society."¹⁷ Bruce Kidd's more recent The Struggle For Canadian Sports moves beyond Metcalfe's chronological pre-war time frame, and explores the growth of professional sports in Canada at the national level in the interwar years.¹⁸

The commercial rise of vaudeville was another expression of the new urban popular culture which developed across the North American continent at the turn of the century. Organised along corporate lines by the Keith Albee and Orpheum theatrical syndicates, this entertainment business flourished until its decline in the 1920s, which was precipitated by the rise in popularity of musical comedy and especially sound motion pictures. One of the most recent and authoritative studies of vaudeville is Shirley

¹⁶ Alan Metcalfe, Canada Learns to Play: The Emergence of Organized Sport 1807-1914, (Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 1987).

¹⁷ Ibid., p.12.

¹⁸ Bruce Kidd, The Struggle for Canadian Sport, (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1996).

Staples' Male-Female Comedy Teams in American Vaudeville 1865-1932.¹⁹ Using the male-female comedy team as her main focus, Staples argues that the tastes of vaudeville's diverse lower middle-class constituency ultimately shaped the entertainment's format and themes. To appeal to the new and growing female market, comic sketches about male-female relations were increasingly introduced, which mocked Victorian characteristics such as prudery and self-restraint.²⁰ Staples also reveals that, during its final successful decade in the 1920s, vaudeville increasingly adopted song and dance numbers to compete with the growing popularity of musical comedy.²¹

Among the new forms of popular culture to emerge in the early decades of the twentieth century, the cinema appealed to the broadest segment of society. An authoritative study of the transformation of the American movie industry, from a fledgling enterprise into a leading form of mass culture, is Larry May's Screening Out the Past.²² May illustrates how the movie industry was pivotal in the cultural transformation of American society. With their large classless seating arrangements, cinemas marked a solid break from Victorian culture that was sharply divided along

¹⁹Shirley Staples, Male-Female Comedy Teams in American Vaudeville 1865-1932 (Michigan, University of Michigan Press, 1984).

²⁰Ibid., pp.4, 113, 238-242; Like Vaudeville, Burlesque also changed with its audience. Robert Allen's Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1991) traces the devolution of burlesque from a respectable nineteenth-century middle-class entertainment into a provocative vehicle of sexual display which catered to a pre-dominantly male working-class audience in the twentieth century.

²¹Ibid., pp.130-131.

²²Larry May, Screening Out the Past, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1980).

ethnic and class lines. By 1928, twenty to thirty million Americans were viewing the same movie programmes each week, across ethnic, class and regional lines.²³

The growth and predominance of the American film industry across North America has also been examined by Canadian cultural historians. In Embattled Shadows: A History of Canadian Cinema 1895-1939 Peter Morris documents the development of the Canadian film industry, which remained essentially a branch plant of Hollywood until the establishment of the National Film Board in 1939.²⁴ With the assistance of Pierre-François Hébert, Yvan Lamonde has explored the rapid expansion of the American cinema into Quebec in the first half of the twentieth century. Le Cinéma au Québec: essai de statistique historique is an informative and detailed statistical study which illustrates that between 1919 and 1930, 96% of the motion pictures presented in Montreal were American in origin.²⁵ At this time, the Hollywood motion picture industry considered Canada "part of its domestic market."²⁶

The growth of cabaret nightlife in New York City and other urban centres at the start of the twentieth century also illustrates the shift away from Victorian self-denial to a new consumer culture of gratification on a cash-down basis. Lewis Erenberg's Steppin'

²³Ibid., p.165.

²⁴Peter Morris, Embattled Shadows: A History of Canadian Cinema 1895-1939, (Montreal, McGill-Queens Press, 1978).

²⁵Yvan Lamonde & Pierre-François Hébert, Le Cinéma au Québec: essai de statistique historique (1896 à nos jours), (Québec, Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1981), p.27.

²⁶Ibid.

Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture 1890-1930

explores how turn-of-the-century New York City nightclubs undermined Victorian social restraints with their rejection of class, racial and gender barriers, and the promotion of self-indulgence through dining, drinking, and dancing.²⁷ Erenberg demonstrates that cabaret nightlife liberated relations between men and women by offering them a public outlet for their private desires.²⁸ With their live fast-paced musical revue entertainment and aura of after-dark sinfulness, cabarets offered a release from the routine pressures of daily life. By the 1920s, New York City was home to 70 cabaret nightclubs, which were frequented particularly by young people.²⁹

The proliferation of musical theatre on Broadway after the First World War constituted another form of popular culture which emerged in reaction to the increasing demand for leisure entertainment. Alfred Bernheim's The Business of the Theatre still remains one of the best studies of the commercial development of Broadway between the American Civil War and the Great Depression.³⁰ Completed in 1932, this pioneer work features informative statistical tables documenting the rise and fall of the American touring roadshow system, which brought a rich variety of high-quality musical theatre entertainment to urban audiences across the continent, and was the basis of Montreal's

²⁷Lewis Erenberg, Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture 1890-1930, (Westport, Greenwood Press, 1981).

²⁸Ibid., pp.120-122.

²⁹Ibid., pp.241-242.

³⁰Alfred Bernheim, The Business of the Theatre: An Economic History of the American Theatre, 1750-1932 (New York, Benjamin Blom, 1932).

professional musical stage. Based largely on Bernheim's original data, Jack Poggi's Theatre in America: The Impact of Economic Forces 1870-1967 is another highly informative economic study of Broadway, which demonstrates that in the period 1910 to 1925, musical productions were far more successful on the North American roadshow network than standard stage plays or legitimate drama.³¹

In more recent years, the Broadway musical stage has been explored by musicologists, who have generally approached the topic by analysing a particular musical genre. During the early 1980s, Gerald Bordman, an accepted authority on Broadway musicals, wrote a series of concise works on the development of operetta, musical comedy, and revue in the United States. Bordman's American Operetta: From H.M.S. Pinafore to Sweeney Todd traces the rise of operetta in America, including its resurgence on Broadway in the 1920s under the composers Sigmund Romberg and Rudolf Friml.³² American Musical Comedy: From Adonis to Dreamgirls examines the development and commercialisation of musical comedy, which was a lighter and more distinctly American genre that evolved out of European operetta at the turn of the century.³³ Musical revue also flourished in the first decades of the twentieth century, and

³¹Jack Poggi, Theatre In America: The Impact of Economic Forces 1870-1967, (New York City, Cornell University Press, 1968), p.29; Jackson Davis, "A History of Professional Theatre in Dallas, Texas, 1920-1930," (Ph.D. thesis, Louisiana State University, 1962).

³²Gerald Bordman, American Operetta: From H.M.S. Pinafore to Sweeney Todd, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1981), pp.120-121.

³³Gerald Bordman, American Musical Comedy: From Adonis to Dreamgirls (New York, Oxford University Press, 1982). See also Cecil Smith, Musical Comedy in America, (New York, Theatre Arts Books, 1981); Glenn Loney, Musical Theatre in America, (Westport, Greenwood Press, 1984).

its spectacular evolution is well-documented in Bordman's American Musical Revue: From the Passing Show to Sugar Babies.³⁴

In contrast to the United States, where the Broadway musical stage has been the focus of countless studies, there has been relatively little scholarly publication on musical theatre in Canada. To date there has appeared no published history of the evolution of musical stage production in Montreal or any other Canadian centre. The existing literature on the topic is scanty and sporadic and has been written by scholars in diverse fields such as music, theatre and cultural history.

The contribution of Canadian musicologists to the study of the early twentieth-century musical stage of Montreal has been very limited. Most of the standard works on the history of musical activity in Canada focus solely on local performing organisations and major musical personalities, and ignore the significant role played by foreign touring companies and artists in enlivening the offerings of musical theatre in Canada. Helmut Kallmann's A History of Music In Canada, 1534-1914 is heavily dependent on secondary sources, scarcely mentions the regular tours made by American, British and French musical roadshows to Montreal and Toronto, and ends abruptly at the outbreak of World War I in 1914.³⁵

³⁴Gerald Bordman, American Musical Revue: From the Passing Show to Sugar Babies, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1985). See also Robert Baral, Revue: The Great Broadway Period, (New York, 1962).

³⁵Helmut Kallmann, A History of Music in Canada, 1534-1914, (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1960).

Clifford Ford's Canada's Music: An Historical Survey also makes scant mention of the success encountered by foreign stars on the Canadian stage.³⁶ Although Ford's chronology moves beyond the First World War, it focuses solely on opera and ignores the lighter forms of musical theatre. Ford's third chapter entitled "Canadian Music Between the Wars (1918-1939)" concentrates instead on the development of orchestras such as the Montreal Symphony Orchestra, music education, and brief biographies of Canadian musical celebrities. A greater use of primary sources such as the contemporary press would undoubtedly have revealed the rich diversity in genre of Montreal's musical theatre repertoire in this period. The musical theatre life of Montreal is similarly ignored in George Proctor's Canadian Music of the Twentieth Century and Timothy McGee's The Music of Canada.³⁷ Both these works depend heavily on secondary sources, and do little more than reproduce the standard comments previously published by musicologists. For instance, the fifth chapter of Timothy McGee's The Music of Canada devoted to the interwar period closely resembles the third chapter of Clifford Ford's Canada's Music: An Historical Survey in both structure and content.

The treatment of musical theatre in the Encyclopedia of Music in Canada is also limited.³⁸ While the individual biographies of Canadian musical personalities are solid

³⁶Clifford Ford, Canada's Music: An Historical Survey, (Agincourt, Ont., GLC Publishers, 1982).

³⁷George Proctor, Canadian Music of the Twentieth Century (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1980); Timothy McGee, The Music of Canada, (New York, W.W. Norton & Co., 1985).

³⁸Helmut Kallmann, Gilles Potvin & Kenneth Winters (eds.), Encyclopedia of Music in Canada, (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, second edition, 1992).

and concise, the entries on Montreal's leading lyric playhouses and musical theatre activity are superficial, and merely give an overall impression of the city's many-faceted musical stage. For example, there is no entry for the Princess Theatre of Montreal, which in its capacity as a Shubert house from 1926 to 1929 presented 75 operas, operettas, musical comedies and revues. Among the star attractions that were staged at the Princess were Al Jolson in Big Boy and Sacha Guitry and Yvonne Printemps in the musical Mozart. The Princess Theatre in the late 1920s also served as the venue for the world premiere of Rudolf Friml's operetta The White Eagle and a number of other pre-Broadway productions.

Equally weak is the entry on His Majesty's Theatre, Montreal's leading playhouse. While accurate enough in its chronology, this entry is sketchy, and ignores the dozens of professional road companies which performed year-round at the playhouse after the First World War. For instance, no reference is made to the successful 1928-1929 tour of the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company, as well as the repeated appearances of London stars Beatrice Lillie and Sir Harry Lauder.³⁹

Biographies of such leading Quebec performers as Emma Albani, Pauline Donalda and Wilfred Pelletier also reveal very little about the international nature of

³⁹See Appendix I; Beatrice Lillie appeared on the stage of His Majesty's Theatre in the London musical revues Charlot's Revue (November 24-29, 1924) and This Year of Grace (May 27-June 1, 1929), and in the American musical comedy Oh, Please (May 30-June 4, 1927). Sir Harry Lauder performed at His Majesty's in November 1922, March 1928, and March 1930. The brief article in the Encyclopedia of Music in Canada devoted to musical activity in Montreal (p.872) is also weak and omits the numerous American, British and French operettas, musical comedies and revues that performed year-round in the city in the 1920s.

Montreal's professional musical theatre. While Hélène Charbonneau's L'Albani focuses on Albani's prolific operatic career in Europe. Wilfred Pelletier's memoir Une symphonie inachevée discusses his success as a conductor with the Metropolitan Opera of New York.⁴⁰ Although touring operatic companies are mentioned in Ruth Brotman's Pauline Donalda, they are dismissed as "makeshift affairs," whose "singing was generally little more than adequate."⁴¹

Somewhat more informative is Charles Goulet's memoir Sur la scène et dans la coulisse which retraces the Belgian-born musician's career with the Société Canadienne d'Opérette and the subsequent Variétés Lyriques operatic company.⁴² Goulet's reminiscences include an informative handlist of the operatic repertoire performed by the Variétés Lyriques company between 1936 and 1955.⁴³

Published more recently, John Gilmore's Swinging in Paradise sheds light on the little explored jazz scene of Montreal since the First World War.⁴⁴ Basing his writing on both primary and secondary sources, including archival material, private interviews, and the press, Gilmore examines the social environment in which jazz musicians flourished

⁴⁰Hélène Charbonneau, L'Albani, (Montreal, Imprimerie Jacques Cartier, 1939); Wilfred Pelletier, Une symphonie inachevée, (Montreal, Leméac, 1972).

⁴¹Ruth Brotman, Pauline Donalda: The Life and Career of a Canadian Prima Donna, (Montreal, Eagle Publishing Co., 1975), p.93.

⁴²Charles Goulet, Sur la scène et dans la coulisse, (Quebec, Ministère des affaires culturelles, 1981).

⁴³Ibid., pp.215-281

⁴⁴John Gilmore, Swinging in Paradise: The Story of Jazz In Montreal, (Montreal, Vehicule Press, 1988).

in the city. Although Gilmore mentions that Montreal was a regular touring destination for American roadshows after the First World War, he quotes very few instances. He also makes only passing reference to the successful 1924 tour of the jazz production Shuffle Along, and fails to make any mention of the show's return engagement at His Majesty's Theatre in November 1926, which won favourable reviews in the local press.⁴⁵

A closer look at Montreal's postwar American musical theatre repertoire also highlights the tour of the musical revue Mamie Smith and Her Gang, whose programme was entirely in the jazz idiom and was accompanied by the world-famous Dixieland Jazz Band.⁴⁶

Canadian theatre specialists have also fallen short of giving adequate prominence to the thriving musical theatre of Montreal. Jean Béraud's chronological survey of theatrical activity 350 ans de théâtre au Canada Français does little more than sketch out the story of Montreal's musical stage.⁴⁷ Although Béraud recognizes the frequent visits to Montreal of professional musical touring troupes, his brief sections devoted to them are very general in tone, and in some cases inaccurate. For instance, in his brief discussion of Montreal's role as a tryout centre for Broadway, Béraud uses Rudolf Friml's The White Eagle as an example, but mistakenly describes the operetta as a

⁴⁵Montreal Star, "Shuffle Along" Goes With Snap and Vim at His Majesty's Theatre," review, November 16, 1926, p.2.

⁴⁶Montreal Standard, "Mamie Smith and Her Own Show," Gala Attraction, Opening Princess," August 20, 1927, p.40.

⁴⁷Jean Béraud, 350 ans de théâtre au Canada Français, (Ottawa, Le Cercle du livre de France, 1958).

"comédie musicale," which he insists received poor reviews in the local press.⁴⁸ Careful scrutiny of the Montreal press, however, reveals that The White Eagle delighted local critics.⁴⁹ Béraud's brief discussion of the 1930 arrest of the Parisian cast of the controversial French operetta Phi-Phi at the Saint-Denis Theatre is also superficial.

Jean Laflamme and Rémi Tourangeau's L'Eglise et le théâtre au Québec explores the difficult relationship between the theatre and the Roman Catholic Church from the early British Regime to the Quiet Revolution.⁵⁰ Its discussion of the period between the two World Wars is broad and general and heavily laden with utterances by church dignitaries, who often denounced theatre performances and motion pictures simultaneously. Curiously, the work makes no reference to either "L'Affaire Aphrodite" or "L'Affaire Phi-Phi," both significant instances of the effects of local theatre censorship.

The articles of John Hare and Jean-Cléo Godin similarly take the broad view and fail to distinguish clearly between legitimate or spoken drama and the musical theatre. According to Hare, the "golden age" of theatre in Montreal had come to a close by 1914, because of rising production costs and increased competition from the cinema.⁵¹

⁴⁸Ibid., p.193.

⁴⁹See Chapter III for a full discussion of the Montreal and Broadway reaction to Rudolf Friml's The White Eagle.

⁵⁰Jean Laflamme & Rémi Tourangeau, L'Eglise et le théâtre au Québec, (Montreal, Fides, 1979).

⁵¹John Hare, "Le théâtre professionnel à Montréal, 1898 à 1937," Archives des lettres Canadiennes (1976), p. 244; Jean-Cléo Godin, "Foreign Touring Companies and the Founding of Theatres in Quebec, 1880-1900 and 1930-1950," in L.W. Connolly (ed.)

Although the roadshow system experienced some decline after its peak in the first decade of the twentieth century, the 1920s were marked by a resurgence of musical theatre activity once the restraints imposed by the war effort were eased. This system continued to bring theatrical entertainment to Montreal until its collapse during the early stages of the Great Depression. Jean-Cléo Godin largely repeats the findings of John Hare, and completely ignores the 1920s and Montreal's unique status as a northern satellite of Broadway during the decade.⁵² Another study of the field of theatre history is Patrick O'Neill's article "The British Canadian Theatrical Organization Society and the Trans-Canada Theatre Society."⁵³ O'Neill traces the rise and fall of the Trans-Canada Theatre organization (1919-1922), a short-lived Canadian theatre consortium which attempted to bring more British attractions to Canada in competition with the American monopolisation of the Canadian musical stage. O'Neill shows how the Canadian theatre organization remained dependent on Broadway because it failed to attract a sufficient number of British productions to keep its theatres in operation.⁵⁴

Montreal's relationship with Broadway has received somewhat more attention

Theatrical Touring and Founding in North America (London, Greenwood Press, 1982), p.90.

⁵²Jean-Cléo Godin, "Foreign Touring Companies and the Founding of Theatres in Quebec, 1880-1900 and 1930-1950," L.W. Connolly (ed.) Theatrical Touring and Founding in North America (London, Greenwood Press, 1982), pp.89-100.

⁵³Patrick O'Neill, "The British Canadian Theatrical Organization Society and the Trans-Canada Theatre Society," Journal of Canadian Studies, (Vol. 15, No.1, 1980), pp.56-67.

⁵⁴Ibid., p.63.

from Quebec theatre historian Jean-Marc Larrue.⁵⁵ Larrue effectively acknowledges Montreal's dependency on Broadway for its professional theatrical fare, but does not support this convincingly with data which could indicate the proportion of American shows appearing on the Montreal stage.⁵⁶

Far more useful are the reminiscences of the Montreal theatre critic Herbert Whittaker. Whittaker's Theatricals identifies a number of Broadway shows which played Montreal in the 1920s, such as the London revue This Year of Grace, which left a lasting impression on the teenage Whittaker.⁵⁷ Equally insightful is the Oxford Companion to Canadian Theatre (1989), in which the short articles by John Ripley on Montreal's leading playhouses suggest more thorough research than those of the Encyclopedia of Music in Canada.⁵⁸

The topic of musical theatre in early twentieth-century Canada has also been neglected by cultural historians. Most of the standard works on the history of Montreal omit any reference to the live theatrical entertainment presented in the city. For instance, John Cooper's Montreal: The Story of Three Hundred Years, retraces the history of the

⁵⁵ Jean-Marc Larrue, "Entrée en scène des professionnels 1825-1930, Le théâtre au Québec 1825-1980, (Montreal, VLB, 1988), pp.25-88. Jean-Marc Larrue has also written Le Monument Inattendu: Le Monument national de Montréal 1893-1993 (Montreal, Editions Hurtubise, 1993) which retraces the history of the Monument National; and with André-G Bourassa, Les nuits de la "Main." (Montreal, VLB, 1993), which explores the diverse recreational establishments that flourished along Boulevard Saint-Laurent in central Montreal.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp.41-44

⁵⁷ Herbert Whittaker, Whittaker's Theatricals, (Toronto, Simon & Pierre, 1993), p.119.

⁵⁸ Oxford Companion to Canadian Theatre, (Toronto, 1989), pp.265, 432.

city's leading cinemas, but makes no references to live theatrical entertainment.⁵⁹

Likewise in her profile of Montreal in the 1920s, Kathleen Jenkins discusses the advent of the radio, the automobile, and the Montreal Forum, but is silent on the subject of theatrical activity.⁶⁰

Paul-André Linteau's recently published Histoire de Montréal depuis la Confédération recognizes the frequent tours of professional road companies to Montreal, but suggests that the breadth of their appeal was a function of their language rather than the quality of their presentation.⁶¹ According to Linteau, Montreal anglophones favoured Anglo-American productions, while francophones attended Parisian attractions. A closer examination of the Montreal musical stage in the 1920s reveals that many musical productions appealed to Montrealers across linguistic lines. The reminiscences of Elsa Gidlow also present a distorted image of the cultural life of the metropolis in the 1920s. According to this feminist poet, Montreal was "culturally provincial" in that period.⁶²

Margaret Westley's Remembrance of Grandeur: The Anglo-Protestant Elite of Montreal correctly describes the city's professional theatre as "branch plant," but fails to

⁵⁹ John Cooper, Montreal: The Story of Three Hundred Years, (Montreal, 1942), pp.121-122.

⁶⁰ Kathleen Jenkins, Montreal: Island City of the St. Lawrence, (New York, Doubleday & Co, 1966), pp.468-471.

⁶¹ Paul-André Linteau, Histoire de Montréal depuis la Confédération (Montreal, Boréal, 1992), pp.247-250.

⁶² Elsa Gidlow, Elsa, I Come With My Songs: The Autobiography of Elsa Gidlow, (San Francisco, Booklegger Press, 1985), p.76.

evaluate the musical theatre preferences of Montreal's class establishment, or the social implications of the reasons for such a substantial attendance.⁶³ Some upper-class Montrealers attended lavish musical shows out of a genuine appreciation of lyric art, while others attended to enhance their personal status and prestige, by a conspicuous display of their latest fashions in costume and their privileged position within the elite. This social dimension to theatre-going has been too often ignored by many historians. With regards to His Majesty's Theatre, Westley states it "presented plays mostly from England."⁶⁴ Careful scrutiny of the Montreal press in the 1920s, however, reveals that 66% of the playhouse's musical theatre repertoire was from the United States.

The most authoritative study of musical theatre in Montreal is Mireille Barrière's monumental Ph.D. thesis "La Société Canadienne-française et le théâtre lyrique à Montréal entre 1840 et 1913."⁶⁵ Based on a wide variety of primary sources including newspaper advertisements and archival material, Barrière's 600-page thesis examines the organization and development of Montreal's musical theatre, which was predominantly an Anglo-American enterprise. Although Barrière's dissertation has not yet been published in its entirety, its major findings are the subject of a recent academic article

⁶³Margaret Westley, Remembrance of Grandeur: The Anglo-Protestant Elite of Montreal 1900-1950, (Montreal, Libre Expression, 1990), p.224.

⁶⁴Westley, p.160.

⁶⁵Mireille Barrière, "La Société Canadienne-française et le théâtre lyrique à Montréal entre 1840 et 1913," (Ph.D. Thesis, Laval University, 1990).

entitled "Montreal. Microcosme du théâtre lyrique nord-américain (1893-1913)."⁶⁶ As the article's title suggests, Barrière illustrates that the musical stage of Montreal at the turn of the century closely resembled that of New York and other major American cities. Barrière's statistical data indicates that from 1897 to 1913, 60% of Montreal's musical theatre repertoire was American.⁶⁷ In short, the Montreal stage was like most North American city stages, a mere satellite of Broadway.

Barrière's article is a fine example of the recent scholarship produced by a number of Quebec historians who have turned to an analysis of the pervasiveness of American influence on the culture of Quebec. These scholars of *américanité* contend that the history of Quebec has been that of a profoundly American society. Yvan Lamonde, one of its leading exponents, has written a number of books and articles illustrating the *américanité* or Americanness of different aspects of Quebec's cultural development.⁶⁸

In addition to the amusement park and the cinema, burlesque has also been studied to explore the *américanité* of Quebec's urban popular culture. Chantal Hébert's Le burlesque au Québec: Un divertissement populaire traces the evolution of burlesque

⁶⁶Mireille Barrière, "Montréal, microcosme du théâtre lyrique nord-américain (1893-1913)," in Lamonde, Yvan & Bouchard, Gerard (eds.), Québécois et Américains: La Culture Québécoise aux XIXe et XXe siècles, (Montreal, Fides, 1995), pp.369-385.

⁶⁷Ibid., p.373.

⁶⁸Yvan Lamonde & Raymond Montpetit, Le Parc Sohmer de Montréal 1889-1919: Un Lieu Populaire de culture urbaine, (Institut Québécois de Recherche sur la culture, 1986); Yvan Lamonde & Pierre-François Hébert, Le Cinéma au Québec: essai des statistique historique (1896 à nos jours), (Québec, Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1981); Yvan Lamonde, Territoires de la culture québécoise, (Sainte-Foy, Presse de l'Université Laval, 1991); Yvan Lamonde, "American Cultural Influence in Quebec: A One-Way Mirror," Alfred Hero & Marcel Daneau (eds.), Problems and Opportunities in U.S.-Quebec Relations, (London, Westview Press, 1984), pp.106-126.

in the province, which in contrast to its American counterpart, was performed in French, far less salacious, and tailored to local audiences.⁶⁹ The burlesque theatre of Montreal during the interwar years has equally been explored by Donald Cuccioletta to illustrate more fully Quebec's historical rapport with the North American continent.⁷⁰ Cuccioletta's dissertation demonstrates that the *américanité* of Quebec society found its strongest expression in the popular culture of Montreal's urban masses.

Quebec art and architecture have also been explored as examples of the *américanité* of Quebec culture and society. The scholarly work of Esther Trépanier on Quebec painting examines the American influences upon Montreal artists in the interwar period.⁷¹ For instance, the series of paintings of the Port of Montreal by Adrien Hébert celebrate the modern industrial city rather than the idealized rural Quebec landscape depicting the traditional French Canadian way of life.⁷² In her study of early twentieth-century Quebec architecture, Madeleine Forget highlights the predominance of American design, best exemplified by the numerous skyscrapers built in downtown Montreal.⁷³

⁶⁹Chantal Hébert, Le burlesque au Québec: Un divertissement populaire, (Montreal, Hurtubise, 1981).

⁷⁰Donald Cuccioletta, "The *Américanité* of Québec: Urban Popular Culture As Seen Through Burlesque Theatre in Montreal, 1919- 1939," (Ph.D. Thesis, UQAM, 1997).

⁷¹Yvan Lamonde & Esther Trépanier, L'avènement de la modernité culturelle au Québec, (Québec, Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1986).

⁷²Esther Trépanier, "L'expérience américaine de la peinture québécoise (1900-1940)," in Lamonde, Yvan & Bouchard, Gérard (eds.), Québécois et Américains: La Culture Québécoise aux XIXe et XXe siècles, (Montreal, Fides, 1995), pp.227-256.

⁷³Madeleine Forget, Les gratte-ciel de Montréal, (Montreal, Éditions du Méridien, 1990); "La contribution américaine dans l'aménagement et l'architecture de Montréal: le gratte-ciel," in Lamonde, Yvan & Bouchard, Gérard (eds.), Québécois et Américains:

Objectives and Methodology

The core of the present dissertation is a detailed study of professional musical theatre activity in Montreal in the decade following the First World War. It explores the *américanité* of Montreal's musical stage through an examination of its satellite relationship with Broadway and a survey of its international musical theatre repertoire from August 1920 to the end of the 1929 season. Throughout this decade, almost all of Montreal's musical attractions were foreign in origin, and staged by American, French and British roadshow companies, arriving mainly from New York. In addition to providing Montreal with a regular supply of the latest and best musical theatre it had to offer, Broadway served as a magnet for European productions to North America. Most French and British theatre managers were reluctant to incur the expenses involved in a trans-Canada tour, without the additional guarantee of a profitable New York run. Throughout the 1920s, when local musical theatre companies were few, small, and unstable, Broadway proved absolutely essential to the very survival of professional musical theatre in Montreal.

Although the musical roadshows staged in the city during the postwar decade did not enjoy entirely universal appeal, they were a popular diversion for a large proportion of Montrealers from all social classes and linguistic backgrounds. A careful examination of the divergent responses to the city's musical theatre entertainment reveals that, contrary to the popular interpretation, Montreal society was neither backward nor provincial, nor was it animated by a single cultural ethos. On the contrary, it was rather a

modern, open, and diverse community, receptive to foreign cultural production, particularly from the United States.

The 1920s have been selected as the chronological focus of this study for a number of reasons. Firstly, the history of the musical stage of Montreal in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has already been the subject of academic scholarship.⁷⁴ Accordingly, the present thesis proposes to investigate the history of the Montreal musical stage after the First World War, a period which, as mentioned previously, has remained largely uncharted.

Secondly, the 1920s are worthy of close examination because they were years of critical importance in the history of North American entertainment. As Broadway prospered in the second half of the decade, Montreal and other cities received some of the best musical roadshows touring North America. During the 1927-1928 and 1928-1929 theatre seasons, for example, Montreal's two leading English-language playhouses, His Majesty's and the Princess Theatres, presented a different Broadway show almost every week. Despite this abundance of musical theatre activity, the musical stage of Montreal was also beset by very serious difficulties. As on Broadway, the Montreal stage was seriously challenged at the end of the decade by the advent of sound pictures, the onset of the Great Depression and the resurgence of local stock theatre companies. The 1920s were the last successful years for large-scale touring companies before the

⁷⁴Mireille Barrière, "La Société Canadienne-française et le théâtre lyrique à Montréal entre 1840 et 1913," (Ph.D. Thesis, Laval University, 1990); Dorith Cooper, "Opera in Montreal and Toronto: A Study of Performance Traditions and Repertoire, 1783-1980," (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Toronto, 1983).

explosion of full-scale cinema, radio programming and other rival forms of entertainment. In short, the musical stage of Montreal never recovered the rich dynamism and diversity it had attained in the 1920s.

Thirdly, a decade analysis of Montreal reveals the rapidly changing cultural life of the city within the context of a developing urban industrial society. During the 1920s, Montreal was at the crossroads of enormous societal change. Throughout this decade, Montrealers lived in a rapidly expanding metropolis which was open to foreign cultural influences, particularly from the United States. Like their urban neighbours to the South, Montrealers were increasingly encouraged to seek self-gratification through consumption, in a variety of new entertainments sweeping the continent. The foreign musical productions presented on the Montreal stage were part of the new North American consumer culture which challenged the long-standing traditions of French Quebec. Montreal in the 1920s was the disputed terrain over which two competing cultural orders and lifestyles contested for dominance. An analysis of the city's foreign musical theatre repertoire, and the conflicting responses to it, highlights a bitter cultural struggle underway within Montreal: an emerging middle class of businessmen, managers and other professionals who embraced modernity and cultural change was pitted against the province's clerical and nationalist elites and their followers who looked backward to the old traditional Quebec with its adherence to religious and patriotic values.

A close examination of the responses of the print media to certain musical attractions during the selected period reveals deep internal dissension within Montreal's francophone population, an important social dimension apparently ignored by previous

historians. The controversy over theatre censorship that came to be known as "L'Affaire Phi-Phi" detailed in Chapter Four derived not so much from a repudiation of Anglo-Saxon traditions, as from the outright rejection in Quebec of the libertine spirit of postwar Paris. Likewise, the extensive public debate that followed the censorship of the French operetta further illustrates the complexity and diversity of opinion within francophone Montreal regarding Quebec's evolving cultural identity.

This study of the musical stage of Montreal is a cross-linguistic analysis. It highlights both French and English-language musical productions without regard to linguistic lines of cleavage. Unlike the public of Toronto, which lacked the linguistic capacity to appreciate French-language productions, many Montrealers were bilingual and generally receptive to second-language attractions. While francophones regularly attended American Broadway shows, an analysis of the city's English-language entertainment press indicates local anglophone interest in some French productions. In short, as elaborated in Chapter Three, the appeal of Montreal's musical theatre offerings transcended divisions based purely on language preference.

The dissertation derives from an examination of both qualitative and quantitative material. Archival collections, contemporary Montreal newspapers, and a wide variety of secondary works were the chief sources of information. Archival collections such as the personal papers of Montreal impresario Louis-Honoré Bourdon and the Montreal music critic Erik McLean (housed at the National Archives in Ottawa) were consulted as were the rich musical theatre collections of the Shubert Archives in New York City. Two

private interviews with Lea Roback, who worked at the box office of His Majesty's Theatre during the 1924-1925 theatre season, were also an important primary source.

Another useful source of primary material was the print media. The research embraced both the American music trade press such as Variety and the entertainment pages of the New York Times as well as the show-pages of Montreal's English- and French-language daily newspapers. The Montreal Star, the Montreal Herald the Montreal Gazette and the Montreal Standard all provided extensive coverage of the city's rich musical theatre life. The French-language daily newspapers La Patrie and La Presse were equally informative.

The quantitative data of the thesis were compiled after a systematic analysis of the entertainment pages of the Montreal Star and La Patrie between August 1920 and June 1930. This information has been condensed into a systematic inventory (See Appendix I) of all professional musical productions staged at His Majesty's, the Princess, and the Saint-Denis Theatres, Montreal's leading venues for professional musical theatre entertainment. These musical attractions have been classified according to their particular genre and the national origin of their touring company. Throughout the 1920s, four principal forms of commercial musical theatre were mounted at these playhouses: operetta, opera, musical comedy, and revue. Although local amateur and semi-professional musical productions were also performed in the city, these have been ignored as outside the parameters of the study.

The dissertation is structurally divided into five sections or chapters. Chapter One explores the economic and social context in which musical theatre flourished in

Montreal after the First World War. Chapter Two examines the organisational structure of Montreal's professional musical theatre, including its leading playhouses, systems of management, and diverse musical theatre audiences. Chapter Three focuses on the musical theatre repertoire of postwar Montreal, which was rich in diversity of genres, and included operetta, opera, musical comedy and revue. The city's privileged theatrical relationship with Broadway is a central point of focus here. Chapter Four moves beyond the central topic of musical theatre to two cases of theatrical censorship which generated extensive public debate, and were of major social significance. Chapter Five concentrates on the forces which precipitated the decline of the professional musical stage of Montreal, in particular the devastating impact of the new-born American sound motion picture industry and the crippling financial effects of the Great Depression.

CHAPTER ONE

MONTREAL IN THE 1920s: THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SETTING

The 1920s brought massive economic and social change to the province of Quebec. Throughout these generally prosperous years, Quebec experienced rapid urbanisation and industrial growth. In 1921, for the first time ever, a majority of Quebecers resided in urban areas. By the end of the decade, the metropolitan region of Montreal, with its one million inhabitants was home to a third of the province's population, and the commercial heart of Canada.

The aim of this first chapter is to outline a brief sketch of the society and economy of Montreal during the 1920s. It is based on both primary and secondary source material and reveals the economic and social context in which musical theatre flourished in Montreal after the end of the First World War. It examines the city's spatial geography, diverse population, industrial, commercial and financial importance, occupational characteristics and social class structure.

The Spatial Geography of Montreal

Situated one thousand miles from the sea at the confluence of the St. Lawrence and Ottawa rivers, the island of Montreal in the 1920s, constituted the largest metropolis in Canada. During the course of the decade, the urban population of the island grew by 30%

from 724 305 in 1921 to just over a million by the 1931 decennial census.¹ The vast majority of the island's inhabitants resided within the city of Montreal, which covered an area of over fifty square miles and was divided into thirty-five wards. Surrounding the city of Montreal were the four suburban municipalities of Westmount, Outremont, Verdun and Lachine which also experienced phenomenal growth and expansion. Among these four, the populations of the working-class town of Verdun and the well-to-do enclave of Outremont more than doubled during the 1920s.² In fact, by the end of the decade, Verdun constituted the third largest city in the province.³

The Demography of Montreal

As in the rest of the province, the population of Montreal was predominantly francophone. Throughout the decade, French-Canadians remained the largest ethnic group in the city and constituted 63% of the total population.⁴ Although most lived in the industrial east end of the city in such working-class districts as Ste. Marie, St. Jacques, Hochelaga and Maisonneuve, a significant number also resided in the south-western suburbs of Verdun and Lachine and the affluent town of Outremont. There was great stratification by income level within Montreal's francophone population.

¹ Paul-André Linteau, Histoire de Montréal depuis la Confédération, (Montreal, Boréal, 1992), p.314.

² Paul-André Linteau, Québec: A History 1867-1929, (Toronto, James Lorimer & Co., 1983), p.382.

³ Serge Durlinger, "City At War: The Effects of the Second World War on Verdun, Québec," (Ph.D. Thesis, McGill University, 1997), p.29.

⁴ Paul-André Linteau, Histoire de Montréal depuis la Confédération, p.317.

The city's majority francophone population was able to maintain its share of the total provincial population in the face of heavy immigration from eastern and southern Europe, chiefly because of Quebec's on-going rural exodus. As the consolidation of Quebec agriculture continued into the postwar era, thousands of subsistence farmers flocked to Montreal in search of industrial jobs and a better life. Altogether, some 90 000 Quebecers are estimated to have migrated to Montreal from rural areas between 1921 and 1931.⁵ Most of these migrants joined the ranks of the city's unskilled industrial work force.

The second largest ethnic group in Montreal was that formed by residents of British origin; the English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish. Together, these numbered 197 725 in 1921 and constituted a quarter of the city's, and slightly more of the island's total population.⁶ The vast majority of Montreal's English-speaking residents were concentrated in the western section of the city in such wards as St. Andrew, St. George, Point St. Charles, and Notre-Dame-de Grâce. At least a quarter of the island's English-speaking inhabitants lived outside the city in the small self-governing towns of Montreal West, Verdun, Lachine, and particularly Westmount, where the overwhelming majority of the population was of British origin.⁷

The anglophone population of greater Montreal was strengthened in the 1920s by the arrival of thousands of skilled and semi-skilled immigrants from Great Britain. Many of

⁵Ibid., p.315.

⁶Ibid., p.324.

⁷Margaret Westley, Remembrance of Grandeur: The Anglo-Protestant Elite of Montreal 1900-1950. (Montreal, Editions Libre Expression, 1990), p.126.

these workers settled in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce and the newly established municipalities of Montreal West and Hampstead.⁸ Many of those who worked in the C.P.R. Angus Railway shops established themselves in the east-end suburb of Rosemont, which underwent rapid urbanisation during the course of the 1920s.

After the French and the English, Montreal's Jewish community formed the third largest cohesive community in the city. In 1921, the Jewish population of Montreal numbered 42 817 and constituted about 6% of its total population.⁹ At this time, more than half of the city's Jewish population was foreign-born, and had migrated to the city from east and central Europe at the turn of the century. While the vast majority were concentrated in the east centre section of the city in such working-class districts as St. Louis, St. Michel and Laurier, a small affluent minority resided in lower Outremont and Westmount.¹⁰

There was also a thriving Italian colony in Montreal. According to the decennial census of 1921, a total of 13 922 Italians lived in Montreal, the fourth largest ethnic group in the city.¹¹ Although Italians were present in most of the city's districts, they were most heavily concentrated in the Mile-End parish, the largest Little Italy in the province.¹² In addition to the Jewish and Italian communities, Montreal was also home to other ethnic

⁸Lloyd Reynolds, The British Immigrant: His Social and Economic Adjustment in Canada (Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1935), pp.128-131.

⁹Gerald Tulchinsky, "The Third Solitude: A.M. Klein's Jewish Montreal, 1910-1950," Journal of Canadian Studies, (1984), p.97.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Annuaire Statistique, (Quebec City, 1925), p.57.

¹²Bruno Ramirez & M. Del Balso, The Italians of Montreal: From Sojourning to Settlement 1900-1921, (Montreal, Éditions du Courant, 1980), pp.2, 41.

groups including Ukrainians, Germans, Scandinavians, Russians and Chinese. Together, these diverse ethnic and cultural communities rendered Montreal as cosmopolitan a metropolis as New York City.

The Economy of Montreal After World War I

During the 1920s, Montreal was a bustling centre of industrial, commercial and financial activity. Ideally situated on a navigable waterway in the interior of the country, Montreal was Canada's leading export centre for grain and other products. In addition to housing the headquarter offices of Canada's leading corporations, it was the hub of the Dominion's extensive transportation system. In short, Montreal was the engine of the Canadian economy. Its diverse work force of 237 760 in 1921 was the largest and most important in the country.¹³

At the end of the First World War, Montreal was Canada's largest manufacturing centre. Its hundreds of factories produced a wide range of items, including railway locomotives, clothing, shoes, beer, and cigarettes. In the early 1920s, the manufacturing field employed 56 787 or almost one-third of Montreal's total work force.¹⁴ By the end of the decade, two-thirds of the province's total manufacturing was based in the city.¹⁵ Most of

¹³Barbara Robertson, "Occupational Traits in Clerical Work: A Study of Employed and Unemployed Women in Montreal," (M.A. Thesis, McGill University, 1935), p.9; Robert Rumilly, Histoire de Montréal: Tome IV, (Montreal, Fides, 1974), pp.33-38; Paul-André Linteau, Histoire de Montréal depuis la Confédération, Chapter 11.

¹⁴Ibid., Linteau, p.299.

¹⁵Susan Trofimenkoff, The Dream of Nation: A Social and Intellectual History of Québec (Toronto, Gage Publishing Ltd., 1983), p.225.

Montreal's industrial plants were concentrated along the Lachine Canal in southwest Montreal and in the east-end districts of Rosemont, Maisonneuve and Hochelaga. With the exception of the shoe industry, which experienced a slump in the 1920s, the city's traditional, manufacturing industries of clothing, textiles, foodstuffs, tobacco and iron and steel all experienced unprecedented expansion.¹⁶ While local textile factories and other light industries employed primarily female workers, heavier steel and iron plants recruited mainly skilled male workers such as mechanics, electricians, blacksmiths and general labourers.

The service sector was Montreal's second largest employer after manufacturing. It expanded during the boom of the late 1920s, only to collapse during the Great Depression, as the purchasing power of its clientele eroded rapidly. In 1921, 42,269 operatives, or one-quarter of Montreal's whole work force was engaged in the service sector.¹⁷ Almost half of these workers were employed in personal and domestic services which comprised, among others, hotel and restaurant employees, theatre personnel, domestic servants, and janitors.¹⁸ Professionals such as teachers, lawyers, doctors, engineers, clergymen, journalists, and artists represented about one-third of this sector.

Given Montreal's importance as the leading Canadian centre of transportation by rail, land and sea, the transportation and communications field was another important

¹⁶Paul-André Linteau, Quebec: A History 1867-1929, p.360.

¹⁷Barbara Robertson, p.9.

¹⁸Lloyd Reynolds, "The Occupational Adjustment of the British Immigrant in Montreal,"(M.A. Thesis, McGill University, 1933), p.49 .

dimension of the city's service sector. Most of its 17,409 workers in 1921 were engaged in the operation of Canada's two great railway corporations, the C.P.R. and the C.N.R., which both had their managerial headquarters in Montreal.¹⁹ As the largest transportation system in the world, the C.P.R. owned and operated over 20,000 miles of track, as well as its own telegraph system, the Angus locomotive building and maintenance shops, and a number of mining, smelting, and real estate interests.²⁰ Another group of predominantly semi-skilled workers maintained streetcars and buses. Others were engaged in dock work at the Harbour of Montreal, the hub of the city's flourishing export trade.²¹

As the busiest transportation centre in the Dominion, Montreal had the highest concentration of automobiles in Canada. General Motors, Ford, Dodge and other leading car dealerships in the city all underwent tremendous growth in the 1920s, particularly at the end of the decade when automobile prices dropped significantly. By 1928, the greater Montreal area was home to over 60,000 motorised vehicles, some 50,000 more than the previous decade.²² "Montreal, with its system of good roads" Lovell's Montreal Directory proudly proclaimed in 1928 was "a parking space for the automobiles of North America."²³

In addition to being the greatest manufacturing centre in the Dominion, Montreal

¹⁹Barbara Robertson, p.9; Lloyd Reynolds, pp.49-50.

²⁰Lovell's Montreal Directory for 1928-1929, p.17.

²¹Terry Copp, The Anatomy of Poverty: The Condition of the Working Class in Montreal 1897-1929, (Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 1974), p.143.

²²Kathleen Jenkins, Montreal: Island City of the St.Lawrence, (New York, Doubleday & Co., 1966), p.467.

²³Ibid., Lovell's Montreal Directory for 1928-1929, p.13.

was the leading commercial metropolis of Canada. Its commercial predominance was due largely to its privileged geographical position as a leading centre for ocean-going shipping and trade. Although located one thousand miles from sea, its bustling inland harbour handled one third of Canada's commerce. It was the third largest seaport in the world and the second largest port on the continent.²⁴ During the 1920s it became the greatest grain-shipping centre in the world. In 1927, for example, the port experienced a new record-breaking year when its total grain deliveries totalled 388,706,488 bushels, a remarkable amount surpassing that of five American ports including that of New York.²⁵

In 1921, close to 40,000 Montrealers were employed in the commercial sector, as merchants, sales representatives, and other related trade occupations.²⁶ More than half of all retail trade in Quebec was conducted in Montreal, which was home to more than one-third of the province's stores.²⁷ Although the commercial retail trade was widespread throughout the city, it was particularly concentrated along St. Catherine Street, Montreal's main commercial thoroughfare. The city's four major department stores - Eaton's, Simpson's, Morgan's and Dupuis Frères all enjoyed a profitable business there. In the East End of the city, St. Hubert Street was also a popular shopping area, especially among middle-class francophones.

²⁴Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs 1927-1928, p.245.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Paul-André Linteau, Histoire de Montréal depuis la Confédération, p.306.

²⁷Paul-André Linteau, Histoire de Montréal depuis la Confédération, p.307; Quebec: A History 1867-1929, p.350.

Montreal was not only a great manufacturing and commercial centre, but also the financial capital of Canada. Most of Canada's large financial corporations had their head offices in Montreal. Located in the old city, along and around St. James Street, Montreal's financial district was home to many splendid banks and imposing commercial buildings, such as the Montreal Stock Exchange, the largest stock market on the continent after New York.²⁸ Like its American counterpart on Wall Street, it experienced spectacular gains in the late 1920s. Another building located in the city's financial district was the Bank of Montreal, which held 26% of the total bank assets of the entire Dominion.²⁹ Montreal was also headquarters of the Royal Bank, whose President, Herbert Holt, dominated the financial life of Quebec throughout the 1920s. The Sun Life Assurance Company, the largest insurance enterprise in the Empire, also had its head offices in Montreal. Operating these diverse financial institutions were some 6712 employees in 1921, and slightly more than twice that number at the end of the decade.³⁰

²⁸Westley, p.178.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Paul-André Linteau, Histoire de Montréal depuis la Confédération, p.303.

The Social Class Structure of Montreal

Although French Canadians constituted the numerical majority within the Greater Montreal area, the English Canadian minority dominated Quebec's economy. With the exception of certain smaller plants and light industries, all of the city's major industries were controlled by Montreal's affluent English-speaking financial elite.

During the decade after the First World War, Montreal's business elite was still, despite some relative decline, the most powerful socio-economic class in Canada. Although it constituted less than a fraction of Montreal's total population, it controlled more than a quarter of the entire wealth of Canada. Staunchly conservative in nature, Montreal's capitalist elite favoured the protectionist policies of the Conservative Party in Ottawa and the laissez-faire outlook of the Taschereau Liberal government of Quebec.³¹

The most prominent member of Montreal's capitalist class was Herbert Samuel Holt, the President of the Royal Bank, the largest financial institution in Canada. Born in King's County, Ireland, in 1856, Holt worked as a civil engineer for the C.P.R. before becoming a powerful industrialist and financier.³² By the 1920s, he not only presided over the Royal Bank and the Montreal, Light, Heat and Power Company but also sat on the boards of several banks and over one hundred companies.³³ Holt's influence in the late 1920s was so powerful that Montrealers complained:

³¹Robert Rumilly, Histoire de Montréal, Tome 4, p.73.

³²Canadian Encyclopedia, (Edmonton, Hurtig Publishers, 1985), p.827.

³³Robert Rumilly, p.72.

We get up in the morning and switch on one of Holt's lights, cook breakfast on Holt's gas, smoke one of Holt's cigarettes, read the morning news printed on Holt's paper, ride to work on one of Holt's streetcars, sit in an office heated by Holt's coal, then at night go to a film in one of Holt's theatres.³⁴

Holt was, in short, one of the wealthiest capitalists in Canada.

In addition to Herbert Holt, Montreal's business establishment in the 1920s included Sir Vincent Meredith Bart, President of the C.P.R. and the Bank of Montreal; John Stewart Norris, Vice-President and Managing Director of the Montreal Light, Heat and Power Co.; Herbert Molson, President of Molson's Brewery; John Wilson McConnell, President of the St. Lawrence Sugar Refineries; Allan William Black, President of the Ogilvie Flour Mills Co.; William Birks, Vice-President of Henry Birks and Sons Jewellers; Paul Sise, President of the Northern Electric Company; Lord Atholstan, owner of the Montreal Star newspaper; Thomas Basset Macaulay, President of the Sun Life Assurance Co., and the Honourable Charles C. Ballantyne, Vice-President and Managing Director of the Sherwin Williams Paint Company of Canada.³⁵ Among the city's francophone business leaders were Senator Frédéric Bédard who was President of the Banque Canadienne Nationale and sat on a number of boards, including the C.P.R.; Beaudry Leman, General Manager of the Banque Canadienne Nationale and a director of Shawinigan Power and other companies; and Lomer Gouin, a director of the Bank of Montreal and a former Premier of Quebec.³⁶

³⁴Peter Newman, Flame of Power: Intimate Profiles of Canada's Greatest Businessmen (Toronto, Longmans, Green, 1959), p.23.

³⁵Canadian Newspaper Service Registered Reference Book 1929-1930, (Montreal, 1930), pp.36,39, 258, 282, 304, 327, 397; Robert Rumilly, pp.99-110; Margaret Westley, pp.17-18.

³⁶Paul-André Linteau, Quebec: A History 1867-1929, p.402.

Many of these prominent businessmen resided in the city's Golden Square Mile, the mountainside area north of Dorchester Street bounded by Bleury Street to the east and Guy Street to the west. Modelled on the grandeur of European manor houses, the great mansions of this district belonged to some of the wealthiest families in Canada. The interiors of these spacious homes were lavishly furnished with rare-wood panelling, oriental rugs, marble fireplaces, classical columns and priceless paintings.³⁷ "Ravenscrag," the mansion of the Allan family located above Pine Avenue even had a suite of rooms for visiting members of the Royal family.³⁸ Included within these great households were living conditions for staffs of domestic servants, who varied in number according to the wealth of a family.³⁹

Not all members of Montreal's social elite resided in the Square Mile district. Some such as Thomas B. Macaulay, John S. Norris and Joseph Simard lived in the nearby affluent municipality of Westmount.⁴⁰ Most of the French Canadian business establishment resided in the bourgeois enclave of Outremont. Thus, Montreal's prominent business families lived in small, stable, and secure neighbourhoods removed from the squalor and poverty of the rest of the city.

It was the affluent families of these powerful captains of industry that were most able to pursue a frivolous leisured lifestyle throughout the 1920s. According to Murray

³⁷Margaret Westley, pp.26-30.

³⁸Eugene Forsey, A Life On the Frontier, (Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1990), p.20.

³⁹Margaret Westley, pp.162-163.

⁴⁰Canadian Newspaper Service Registered Reference Book 1929-1930, pp.258, 327, 396.

Ballantyne, who was the youngest son of Charles C. Ballantyne, and a resident of the Square Mile, release and self-fulfilment rather than restraint were greatly prized by Montreal's privileged youth in the consumer culture of the 1920s:

In this larger group we all had certain things in common. We were all, or nearly all, interested in the theatre and in music; but what bound us most firmly together was a love of parties. Oh, the parties of the twenties! Never again can their like be seen in Canada. All the facilities were at hand. Houses were still large and sometimes immense. Servants were taken for granted. Money was not worth thinking about. Everyone had time, and no one had worries. We dined and we dined. After dinner came ballet, theatre, concerts, or dancing. But only when midnight was approaching did the really big parties begin, when we would sweep up whatever artists had been performing and go on to supper.⁴¹

These personal recollections of Murray Ballantyne suggest that Montreal's social elite fully indulged in the city's fast-paced downtown life. Among the city's diverse recreational activities were the live Broadway productions presented at His Majesty's Theatre on Guy Street and the Princess Theatre on St. Catherine Street, both conveniently located within proximity of the Golden Square Mile and Westmount.

The middle class of Montreal constituted about one third of the city's total population. The general prosperity of the 1920s and the industrial, commercial and financial expansion of the city greatly increased the size of this social grouping. Its ranks

⁴¹Murray Ballantyne, All Or Nothing, (New York, Sheed & Ward, 1956), p.49.

included all those non-manual workers whose standards of living varied from the very affluent to the very modest.⁴²

Paul Axelrod has written that it is difficult to define the middle class in the interwar period with any precision, but we can at least say that Montreal's upper middle class included members of the liberal professions, businessmen, senior managers and other professionals.⁴³ The city's nearly 1700 doctors, lawyers and notaries all enjoyed financial security in the 1920s.⁴⁴ French Canadians were particularly numerous among the city's legal and health-care professionals. The rapid growth of Montreal and the prosperity of the late 1920s also favoured merchants, accountants, senior managers and other business professionals. Independent workers such as insurance agents prospered as life insurance gained increasing popularity after the First World War.⁴⁵ Perhaps the most financially secure middle-class profession in Montreal in the 1920s was that of the accountant.⁴⁶ These well-trained professionals remained indispensable in a society driven increasingly by consumer consumption. Other professional workers such as university professors, teachers, ecclesiastics, and journalists also played increasingly important roles during this period.

⁴²Paul Axelrod, Making a Middle Class: Student Life in English Canada During the Thirties, (Montreal, McGill-Queens Press, 1990), p.157, 170; Leonard Marsh, Employment Research, (Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1935), pp.58, 61-63.

⁴³Paul Axelrod, Making a Middle Class: Student Life in English Canada During the Thirties, p.44, 157.

⁴⁴Paul-André Linteau, Histoire de Montréal depuis la Confédération, p.335.

⁴⁵Ibid., p.336.

⁴⁶Ibid.

While passage from the middle class to the business elite was virtually impossible, Montreal's upper middle class experienced unprecedented growth and security throughout the 1920s. Although they did not possess the domestic staffs and opulent life-styles of the upper class, most members of Montreal's middle class enjoyed a relatively high standard of living. The great majority resided in the comfortable residential districts of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, Montreal West, Outremont, and LaSalle, which were all within easy access of their work places as well as the downtown recreational life of the city.

The commercial and financial expansion of Montreal equally favoured the creation of many clerical and managerial positions in the city's economy. Most of these white-collar positions were in accounting, investment and legal firms and banks controlled by the city's business elite and were held mainly by anglophones, at least a quarter of whom were British-born males.⁴⁷ The white-collar sector also included the sales staff of Montreal's leading department stores and recreational sites. Although clerks and other white-collar workers enjoyed job security, most were paid very low wages.⁴⁸ During the 1920s, male clerical workers received average annual incomes of \$1200.00 per year or \$23.00 per week.⁴⁹ Thus, most of the city's clerical workers belonged to the lower middle-class and earned annual salaries only slightly superior to those of working class factory workers.

During the 1920s, more than two-thirds of Montreal's population belonged to the

⁴⁷Ronald Rudin, The Forgotten Quebecers: A Study of English-Speaking Quebec 1759-1980, (Montreal, Institut Québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1985), p.209; Lloyd Reynolds, The British Immigrant: His Social and Economic Adjustment in Canada p.99.

⁴⁸Margaret Westley, p.92.

⁴⁹Terry Copp, p.36.

working class. Included within its ranks were all those whose incomes were derived from hourly wages as opposed to salaried employees.⁵⁰ This included hourly wage earners, factory workers, labourers and domestics. Most of the city's working class labour force was unskilled and worked in low-wage industries such as textile production, tobacco and shoe- and boat-manufacturing. Skilled workers and specialised tradesmen who averaged higher annual salaries comprised part of the lower middle class.

Although predominantly francophone, and concentrated in the East End of the city, Montreal's working class was not monolithic. In addition to east-end francophones, Montreal's working class population included Italian labourers from the city's Mile End district, English and Scottish factory workers from Verdun, Irish labourers from Point St. Charles and Jewish garment workers from central Montreal. In short, the city's working class labour force was comprised of a multitude of different ethnic, linguistic and religious groups.

Unlike the comfortable social elite and middle class, Montreal's working class suffered from the effects of an unstable labour market, low wages and poor housing and living conditions. Contrary to the popular interpretation, unemployment was a major problem faced by the working class of Montreal in the 1920s, particularly in the early years of the decade. The post-war recession, which began in 1920, persisted until 1923 leaving a quarter of Quebec's trade unionists unemployed.⁵¹ Montreal's industrial labour force fared

⁵⁰Ibid., preface.

⁵¹Desmond Morton, Working People: An Illustrated History of the Canadian Labour Movement, (Ottawa, Deneau Publishers, 1984), p.126.

little better. Economic fluctuations and seasonal slowdowns produced high unemployment in many sectors of the local economy. Construction workers, longshoremen, freight handlers, and other harbour employees remained jobless during the winter months because of the seasonal nature of their work.

In The Anatomy of Poverty Terry Copp has shown that the average annual income for a working class employee in Montreal in the 1920s was less than \$1000.00, an amount well below the poverty line of \$1500.00 a year, established by the federal Ministry of Labour.⁵² By 1926, one half of all working-class males received less than \$1500.00 annually, and more than two-thirds earned under \$1300.00.⁵³ While male factory workers averaged under \$1100.00 per year or \$21.15 per week, common labourers earned less than \$900.00 annually or only \$17.30 a week.⁵⁴ Most working class Montrealers worked more than fifty hours a week.

To supplement inadequate household incomes, many working-class women were forced to enter the labour market. More than one third of Montreal's female employees in the 1920s worked alongside their brothers, fathers and husbands in manufacturing, while another third was engaged in the service sector.⁵⁵ On the whole, Montreal's female working-class labour force was young, unskilled and poorly paid. Throughout the 1920s, their salaries remained substantially inferior to those of their male co-workers. Child labour

⁵²Terry Copp, pp.30-44.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Terry Copp, p.36.

⁵⁵Ibid., pp.45-46.

was also common in Montreal, especially among large working-class French Canadian families. In poor working-class families, children went to work, instead of school. Children between the ages of fourteen and sixteen were employed in textile, tobacco and food industries throughout the city.⁵⁶ Most worked long hours for very low wages.

As a result of their low incomes, most working class Montrealers lived in rented accommodation and suffered poor housing and living conditions. The comfortable homes of such residential areas as Outremont, Montreal West, Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, and Hampstead were clearly beyond the reach of poor working-class families. Most working class Montrealers lived in squalid row houses. Moreover, with the arrival of new residents to the city, available housing in certain areas became scarce, forcing several families to share a single crowded dwelling. Overcrowding remained a major problem throughout the decade, especially within the redbrick tenements located in proximity to industrial plants.⁵⁷ These difficult conditions contributed to the emergence of many slum areas. Writing in 1935, sociologist Lloyd Reynolds described one of the city's downtown slums as follows:

East of Bleury, between St. Catherine and Craig, lies the "Dufferin Square" slum, a district of back-tenements, one-room homes, squalor and social dependency...In the slum, English Canadians, French Canadians, Negroes, Chinese, and almost every European nationality rub shoulders.⁵⁸

⁵⁶Ibid., p.55.

⁵⁷Ibid., p.73.

⁵⁸Lloyd Reynolds, The British Immigrant: His Social and Economic Adjustment in Canada, p.147.

It has been estimated that throughout the 1920s, the basic necessities of shelter and food absorbed three-quarters of working-class family revenues.⁵⁹ Given this drastic situation, it is small wonder that much of Montreal's working-class population lived in such abject poverty and suffered one of the highest infant mortality rates in the Western world. While infant mortality was less than 6% in the affluent municipalities of Westmount and Outremont in 1922, it exceeded 20% in the working-class wards of Ste. Marie and St. Henri, and struck working-class francophone households with particular severity.⁶⁰ The city's infant mortality rate declined sharply in the late 1920s, with the enforcement of 1925 regulations requiring milk to be pasteurised. Despite some improvement, Montreal's infant mortality rate remained much higher than that of Toronto and other North American cities.

In contrast to the more affluent middle and upper classes, the working-class population of Montreal worked long hours for very low wages, leaving very little time and money for leisure pursuits. While the city's social elites enjoyed the high life, most working class Montrealers struggled to make ends meet. Aside from Montreal's numerous motion picture palaces, most of the city's finer recreational activities were clearly beyond the reach of working-class families who remained trapped, until the Second World War, in a vicious culture of poverty.

This outline sketch of the socio-economic structure of Montreal in the 1920s has emphasised two characteristics of the metropolis. First, it was the greatest industrial.

⁵⁹L'Industrialisation à Hochelaga-Maisonneuve 1900-1930. (Montreal, Atelier d'Histoire d'Hochelaga Maisonneuve, 1980) p.39

⁶⁰Terry Copp, pp.94-95

commercial and financial centre of Canada. Not only was Montreal the seat office of Canada's largest commercial and financial corporations, but it was also the hub of the country's extensive sea, rail and road transportation systems. Its bustling Port and Stock Exchange were the largest on the continent after New York. Montreal, in short, was the commercial heart of Canada.

Second, Montreal was also a city of tremendous contrasts. The disparity between the city's upper and lower classes was striking. While the industrial, commercial and financial life of Montreal was dominated by the likes of the Holts, McConnells, and Molsons, who resided in the luxurious homes of the Square Mile and Westmount, more than half of the city's population lived in abject poverty in such industrial districts as Hochelaga, Point St. Charles and St. Henri. As the city's comfortable elites lived the high life, most working-class Montrealers struggled to survive.

The 1920s were not "roaring" for the vast majority of Montrealers who worked long hours, received low wages, and suffered poor living conditions. Rather, the 1920s were a prosperous decade only for Montreal's social elite and middle class who enjoyed tremendous comfort and security. As will become clear, it was the numerous theatregoers from these affluent social classes as well as Montreal's status as Canada's leading financial and commercial metropolis that attracted New York's spectacular Broadway productions north.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF MONTREAL'S MUSICAL THEATRE

"So long as we are controlled by New York we cannot call our theatrical souls our own. We are, theatrically, still an appanage of New York, with London getting opportunity when there is an open date."

- Samuel Morgan-Powell¹

The artistic and cultural dependency of Montreal on the New York stage for most of its musical theatre entertainment dates back to the first half of the nineteenth century. As early as the 1842-1843 theatre season, the Comic Opera Company of Paris came to Montreal after a successful tour of New York City.² Montreal's geographical proximity to the growing theatrical capital to the South helped to ensure it a constant supply of musical attractions. During the active 1859 season, for example, Montreal received the Sanford Opera Company in June, the Parodi Italian Opera in July, and the Cooper English Opera in November.³ By the 1870s, Montreal audiences were regularly being entertained at the Theatre Royal by the comic operas of Jacques Offenbach.⁴ These light operas were

¹ Montreal Star, "Theatre Booking Control." October 5, 1929, p.26.

² M. Barrière, "La Société Canadienne-Française et le Théâtre Lyrique à Montréal entre 1840 et 1913," (Ph.D. thesis, Laval University, 1990), p.309.

³ Jean-Cléo Godin, "Foreign Touring Companies and the Founding of Theatres in Quebec, 1880-1900 and 1930-1950," in L.W. Conolly, Theatrical Touring and Founding in North America (Westport, Greenwood Press, 1982), p.91.

⁴ Ibid., p.307.

followed into the city by the operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan in the 1880s. With few exceptions, such as the recitals by the young French-Canadian soprano Emma Albani, who sang in the city in 1883, the repertoire of live musical theatre entertainment offered to the Montreal public was channelled via New York.⁵

The number of roadshow companies travelling to Montreal increased in the 1890s, as a result of the city's growing population and the North American railway construction boom. By the end of the nineteenth century, both Viennese operettas and early American musicals were playing year-round at Montreal's Royal Côté Theatre and the Academy of Music.⁶ As the tour circuit peaked at the beginning of the twentieth century, Montreal became a regular stop for touring American, British and French theatre companies. Although the touring roadshow system began to decline in the second decade of the century, musical productions continued to draw substantial audiences until sound films and radio broadcasts began attracting an ever-growing proportion of the public in the early 1930s.

The aim of the second chapter of this dissertation is to analyse the organisational structure of Montreal's professional musical stage during the 1920s, the last successful decade for large-scale touring musical productions. In this period, almost all of Montreal's musical theatre attractions were still foreign in origin, and staged mainly by roadshow companies from the United States, France and Great Britain. As the city's musical theatre repertoire was largely from American sources, this chapter will explore the development of

⁵Encyclopedia Canadiana, Volume I, (Toronto, Grolier Limited, 1975), p.96

⁶Jean-Marc Larrue, Le Monument Inattendu: le monument national de Montréal 1893-1993, (Montreal, Éditions Hurtubise, 1993), p.84.

the musical roadshow in the United States and its operation in Montreal. Montreal's unique role as a Canadian satellite of Broadway is illustrated through a study of the history of the leading playhouses of the city, their systems of management, and the audiences they attracted for musical performances. This survey indicates that the musical roadshows staged in the city attracted an enthusiastic following among all classes of Montreal society.

The North American Theatrical Touring System

For a better understanding of the organisation of Montreal's professional musical theatre in the 1920s, it is necessary first to trace the development of the commercial touring theatre system in the United States itself. A brief overview of its evolution and operation reveals both the rationale and the technique of transferring Broadway successes to Montreal. The travelling roadshow system which dominated the city's professional musical stage after World War I evolved from the American stock system which became standard in the decades following the American Civil War. Unlike earlier stock companies, which were purely local and decentralised in nature, touring roadshow companies duplicated the cast of New York successes and acquired most of their profits on tour circuits.⁷ The road circuit consisted of a network of communities in which touring companies played for one week or less, outside of the leading production centre of New York City.⁸

⁷Jack Poggi, Theatre in America: The impact of Economic Forces 1870-1967, (New York, Cornell University Press, 1968), pp.4-8.

⁸Alfred Bernheim, The Business of the Theatre: An Economic History of the American Theatre 1750-1932, (New York, Benjamin Blom, 1932),p.75.

In addition to the temporary and transient nature of their visits to theatre centres, another essential characteristic of roadshow companies was their dependency on the star system. This consisted of the use of a celebrated performer to reinforce the drawing-power of a theatrical production.⁹ As singer-actresses such as Lillian Russell won much acclaim on Broadway, theatre audiences clamoured to see them outside New York in cities like Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia and Baltimore. Absolutely essential to the success of these new touring companies was the expanding American railway network which transported theatrical companies to and from New York swiftly and comfortably.¹⁰ As roadshows travelled from one city to another, using the slogan "Direct from New York," local stock groups gradually lost their popularity, and were disbanded for lack of financial support.¹¹

Theatre management and play production ultimately split into two separate but complementary interests, and businessmen gradually gained control of the theatre through the system of booking productions into playhouses. Booking agents served as middlemen between theatre owners and producers by routing attractions for theatre managers, who grew dependent upon the visits of road companies to fill their auditoriums.¹²

During the 1890s, as American industry became increasingly consolidated and centralised, New York businessmen steadily gained monopolistic control over the North American theatre. In 1896, New York's leading theatrical entrepreneurs consolidated their

⁹Ibid., pp.28-29.

¹⁰Poggi, p.6; Bernheim, p.151.

¹¹Andrew Harris, Broadway Theatre, (New York, Routledge, 1994), p.8.

¹²A. Bernheim, "The Evolution of the Legitimate Theatre in America," New York Times, March 25, 1928.

booking and producing operations into a single theatre cartel. Under the direction of Abraham Erlanger, the New York Theatrical Syndicate exercised virtually dictatorial control over North American theatres throughout the first decade of the twentieth century.¹³

Each theatre which concluded booking contracts with the Erlanger office was obliged to present only those attractions organised by the syndicate. If a theatre manager refused to present a particular Erlanger show, he risked being boycotted by the powerful trust. In exchange for providing attractions, the Syndicate demanded as much as one third of each theatre's net profits.¹⁴ At its peak, the Erlanger syndicate controlled the bookings of over 700 playhouses across North America.¹⁵

The exclusionist stranglehold exercised by the New York Theatrical Syndicate over the North American theatre did not remain uncontested for long. In 1909, a rival theatrical trust directed by the Shubert brothers of Syracuse, New York, established its organisation, and after three years of bitter rivalry, gained and retained the upper hand until well after the First World War.¹⁶ Throughout the 1920s, the Shubert Theatre Corporation controlled 60% of all the better class theatres across North America, including 86 first-class theatres in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Boston, and another 27 in other major cities.¹⁷ By the end of the decade, the Shubert organisation was producing 25% of all plays in North America, a

¹³ Alfred Bernheim, The Business of the Theatre: An Economic History of the American Theatre 1750-192, pp.46-65.

¹⁴ Poggi, p.14.

¹⁵ Patrick O'Neill, "The British Canadian Theatrical Organization Society and the Trans-Canada Theatre Society," Journal of Canadian Studies, Vol. 15, No. 1 (1990), p.57.

¹⁶ Poggi, p.18.

¹⁷ Jerry Stagg, The Brothers Shubert, (New York, Random House, 1968), pp.217, 221.

proportion greatly superior to that of the rival New York Theatrical Syndicate or any other theatrical production combine.¹⁸ Although the Erlanger Syndicate was less powerful than the Shubert corporation, it still had a significant share of the North American booking market until the advent of the Great Depression.

As part of their struggle for supremacy of the North American theatre, both the Shubert and Erlanger trusts extended their circuits northwards into Canada, particularly to Toronto and Montreal. In their view, Montreal represented another large American city with a critical mass of affluent music-lovers necessary to provide a profitable market. During the 1920s, Montreal was not only the leading Canadian industrial, commercial and financial centre, but also ranked demographically among North America's largest metropolises.¹⁹ By 1930, the total population for city and suburbs of one million compared favourably with that of Los Angeles and exceeded that of Cleveland, St. Louis, Baltimore, Boston, Pittsburgh and Washington (See Table I). As the hub of Canada's extensive transportation network, Montreal also offered obvious advantages as a nodal centre linked to the United States road and rail systems. Situated only 400 miles to the North, it was within overnight reach of New York, especially by rail. Throughout the 1920s, trains operated daily by the New York Central and Delaware & Hudson Railway companies between Manhattan's Grand Central Station and Windsor Station in downtown Montreal carried northward the casts and crews of touring Broadway shows.²⁰

¹⁸Ibid., p.217.

¹⁹Robert Rumilly, Histoire de Montréal Tome IV. (Montreal, Fides, 1974), p.35.

²⁰Lovell's Montreal Directory for 1928-1929, p.17.

TABLE I
NORTH AMERICA'S LARGEST CITIES BY POPULATION

CITY	1920	1930
NEW YORK	5,560,048	6,930,446
CHICAGO	2,701,705	3,376,438
PHILADELPHIA	1,823,779	1,950,961
DETROIT	993,678	1,568,662
LOS ANGELES	576,673	1,238,048
MONTREAL	724,305 *	1,003,868 **
CLEVELAND	796,841	900,000
ST. LOUIS	772,897	821,960
BALTIMORE	733,826	804,874
BOSTON	48,060	781,188
PITTSBURGH	588,343	669,817
SAN FRANCISCO	506,676	634,394

Sources: United States Fifteenth Decennial Census, 1930

* Metropolitan Montreal, Census of Canada, 1921

** Metropolitan Montreal, Census of Canada, 1931

Roadshow companies from New York travelled to Montreal in specially designed trains, with comfortable parlour and sleeping cars for long-distance travel. The Shubert production of Big Boy, for instance, reached Montreal and other destinations in a special ten-car train, large enough to accommodate its entire 100 member-cast, and also elaborate stage sets, numerous costumes, heavy baggage, and other properties.²¹ For the casts and crews of roadshow companies, the rail-journeys between out-of-town appearances were opportunities for rest and relaxation. While some performers dozed in private sleepers,

²¹ Montreal Star, January 22, 1927, p.20.

others engaged in reading, card games, and conversation.²² Touring companies generally reached Montreal a day or two before their opening Monday night performance.

The Shubert and Erlanger trusts were not alone in seeking to exploit Montreal and the Canadian theatrical market. In 1919, the Trans-Canada Theatre Society was established by a group of Canadian Pacific Railway magnates led by Lord Shaughnessy, to counter the American monopolisation of Canadian theatres.²³ This short-lived Montreal-based syndicate aimed to reverse Canada's dependency on the New York stage by organising an all-Canadian touring system using British attractions from London's West End.

In early December 1919, the Trans-Canada Company acquired the theatrical real estate empire of the Canadian impresario Ambrose Small. Included in the \$1,600,000 sale were the Grand Opera Houses in Toronto, Hamilton, London, Peterborough, Kingston, and Ottawa, as well as leasing rights to the Walker chain of theatres in the Canadian West, all conveniently linked by the Canadian Pacific Railway line.²⁴ Within days of this transaction, the Trans-Canada company organised the first of several transcontinental tours of theatrical companies for the entertainment of the Canadian public.

Musical productions were financially the most successful attractions brought to Canada by the new syndicate. Direct from a long five-year run at London's Daly Theatre, Percy Hutchison's sensational operetta The Maid of the Mountains was a great success in

²²H. Taubman, Opera Front and Back, (New York, Scribner's Sons, 1938), pp.327-328.

²³O'Neill, pp.60-61.

²⁴Oxford Companion to Canadian Theatre, (Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 499, 563.

Montreal.²⁵ Henry Cartwright, a Montreal veteran theatregoer who greatly enjoyed the show, praised the Trans-Canada Theatre Organisation and its fine line of English attractions in the following letter addressed to Samuel Morgan-Powell, the drama critic of the Montreal Star:

I want to thank you for your criticism of the Maid of the Mountains. We get far too few of this sort of show. This is a British Dominion, and we are supposed to be British, but in the last nine years...we have had little else but a long procession of American stuff. It may be all right for the U.S.A., but this Dominion isn't American, and never will be. Go ahead, and more luck to your arguments.

- Henry B. Cartwright.²⁶

Cartwright was certainly not alone in applauding the British productions imported by the Trans-Canada organisation, which under normal circumstances, would never have been seen in Canada.

Despite the popularity of British performers in Canada, the Trans-Canada Theatre organisation remained dependent on American theatrical interests for its survival. From the start, the Canadian syndicate could not book enough first-class English attractions to keep its national chain of theatres supplied with a regular repertoire. Neither was it profitable for British companies to make long and expensive transatlantic voyages to Canada, without extending the tour into the United States.²⁷ By 1921, the troubled Canadian consortium was forced to turn to the Shubert organisation for a supply of American shows to complete its

²⁵Montreal Star, October 2, 1920, p.24.

²⁶Montreal Star, October 9, 1920, p.34.

²⁷Oxford Companion to Canadian Theatre, p.563.

commitments for the season.²⁸ This dependency upon the Shuberts, coupled with labour troubles in the British theatre, effectively ended the Trans-Canada Theatre Company's mandate to present first-class British shows for the entertainment of the Canadian public. By the summer of 1922, the organisation had disintegrated.

The collapse of the Trans-Canada Theatre Organisation did not bring to an end the importation of British shows to Canada. English companies continued to tour the Dominion under the auspices of the Shuberts of New York and the All-Canada Tours organisation. Established in the early 1920s by Bert Lang, the Manager of His Majesty's Theatre, and Frank O'Neill, the business manager for English Shakespearean actor John Martin-Harvey, All Canada Tours was a Canadian booking agency devoted exclusively to the presentation of English productions throughout the Dominion.²⁹ The agency was particularly active in the final years of the 1920s, and sponsored the tours of John Martin-Harvey, the West End revues of George Robey, and the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company.

Montreal's Theatre District

During the 1920s, Montreal's theatre district was concentrated in the congested downtown core of the city, and ran along or near St. Catherine Street between St. Denis Street in the east and Atwater Street in the west. Like Broadway in New York, St. Catherine Street was home to a multitude of recreational establishments, including restaurants, nightclubs, dance halls, motion picture palaces, vaudeville and burlesque

²⁸O'Neill, p.63.

²⁹Montreal Star, June 22, 1929.

theatres and first-class playhouses. Although admittedly not as concentrated or extensive as New York's theatre district, the theatrical centres strung along St. Catherine Street in the postwar years represented the Canadian equivalent of Broadway in the public mind.

In the decade following the First World War, Montreal was a pleasure-loving, easy-going city, offering entertainment round the clock. It was the only major city in North America to have completely rejected prohibition, and so developed a solid reputation as a fast-paced party town.³⁰ Its glamorous nightlife and diverse recreational establishments attracted thousands of tourists each year. In 1928 alone, the city was host to 1.5 million visitors, primarily from the United States.³¹ American tourist traffic to Montreal was particularly heavy in the final prosperous years of the decade. Over the New Year's Holiday season of 1928, the city attracted about 75,000 visitors, chiefly from the United States, who contributed \$3,000,000 to the local economy.³²

The city owed its popularity for tourists from the United States largely to its extensive night-life, largely centred along the axis of Boulevard St. Laurent, which was commonly known as "the Main." This busy commercial artery was the dividing line between the predominantly francophone east end of the city, and the English-speaking west end. The many nightclubs that flourished here in the late 1920s, often featured well-known live American jazz bands. One typical example was the Frolics, which had a large regular

³⁰John Gilmore, Swinging In Paradise: The Story of Jazz in Montreal, (Montreal, Vehicule Press, 1988), pp.29-30.

³¹Kathleen Jenkins, Montreal: Island City of the St. Lawrence, (New York, Doubleday & Co., 1966), p.461.

³²Variety, January 9, 1929, p.53.

clientele, drawing on local and foreign patrons.³³ More exclusive nightclubs such as the Venetian Gardens, were located in the fashionable uptown sector of the city along St. Catherine Street West.³⁴

Besides well-frequented nightclubs, Montreal also featured a number of elegant dance halls. The Palais d'Or dance hall on Stanley Street was especially popular among the city's middle-class anglophone youth.³⁵ The Normandie Roof of the Mount Royal Hotel, which opened in December 1922, was also a popular venue for late-night dancing. Among the big bands that performed at this fashionable Peel Street hotel were Rudy Vallée's Connecticut Yankees and Will Osborne and his Manhatters, one of New York's favourite dance orchestras.³⁶ For its part, the Palm Room of the luxurious Ritz Carlton Hotel also featured an attractive programme of live entertainment and ballroom dancing. On New Year's Eve 1919, some 700 pleasure-seeking Montrealers gathered at this fashionable hotel to celebrate the opening of a new decade.³⁷

Downtown Montreal was also home to numerous motion picture palaces. Most of the city's first-run cinemas such as the Loews, the Palace, the Capitol and the Imperial were owned by American interests, and located along or near St. Catherine Street West. Some of these establishments such as the Loews and the Imperial were hybrid theatres, which

³³Gilmore, pp.32-33, 302.

³⁴Gilmore, p.92.

³⁵Gilmore, pp.92-94; Montreal Gazette, May 30, 1992, p.10.

³⁶The Montrealer, January 1929, p.38.

³⁷Montreal Star, January 2, 1920, p.26.

presented both films and vaudeville shows.³⁸ As movies gradually evolved into feature-length entertainments, short variety acts were presented live in the intervals between film projections. With the advent of the sound motion picture industry in the late 1920s, however, most of Montreal's movie houses discontinued their live stage attractions and specialised exclusively on major feature films. At this time, 96 % of all films presented in Montreal's motion picture houses were American in origin.³⁹

In addition to motion pictures, burlesque also flourished in postwar Montreal. Like vaudeville, this popular form of entertainment featured singing, dancing, and especially slapstick comedy. The leading burlesque theatre in the city was the Gayety, situated at the intersection of St. Catherine and St. Urbain Streets. Constructed in 1912 as a vaudeville house, the Gayety was part of the Columbian Amusement circuit, and received most of its elaborate burlesque shows direct from New York.⁴⁰ While the theatre was Montreal's leading venue for American burlesque, most of the city's burlesque establishments were located on Boulevard St. Laurent. Along this major commercial street, local Quebec entertainers performed burlesque shows both in French and English at the King Edward, the Midway, and the Starland, which could accommodate a combined audience of 3000 spectators.⁴¹

³⁸Yvan Lamonde & Pierre-François Hébert, Le Cinéma au Québec:essai de statistique historique, (Quebec, Institut Québécois de Recherche sur la culture, 1981), p.24.

³⁹Ibid., pp.27, 33.

⁴⁰Montreal Gazette, March 13, 1993, p.6.

⁴¹Chantal Hébert, Le burlesque au Québec: Un divertissement populaire, (Montreal, Hurtubise HMH, 1981),p.40.

According to Quebec theatre historians Jean-Marc Larrue and André Bourassa, the burlesque halls and other recreational establishments along Boulevard St. Laurent constituted the "Off-Broadway district" of Montreal.⁴² For its part, St. Catherine Street was generally considered to be the Broadway of Montreal. Along and near this busy downtown thoroughfare were His Majesty's, the Princess, and the Saint-Denis Theatres, which ranked among North America's most elegant playhouses. These theatres were continuously active in the 1920s, and constituted the major venues for up-scale foreign musical theatre in Montreal.

Erected in 1898 on Guy Street, north of St. Catherine, Her Majesty's Theatre was Montreal's foremost centre for touring musical attractions for more than half a century. The opulent playhouse was constructed by the eminent New York architectural firm of J.B. McElfatrick and Son at a cost of \$350,000, and could accommodate 1704 patrons.⁴³ Its auditorium consisted of a main floor with 871 stalls, a lower and upper balcony (799 seats), and ten boxes (containing a total of 34 seats) on either side of its large proscenium stage.⁴⁴ Its lavish interior decor featured marble floors, crystal chandeliers, red-plush upholstered seats and elegant velvet curtains.⁴⁵ In addition to the auditorium, the playhouse included

⁴²André-G Bourassa & Jean-Marc Larrue, Les nuits de la "Main." (Montreal, VLB Éditeur, 1993), p.20.

⁴³Oxford Companion to Canadian Theatre, p.265.

⁴⁴Ibid.; Plan of His Majesty's Theatre, Archival Fonds Louis Honoré Bourdon, MG30, National Archives of Canada.

⁴⁵Ibid.; Montreal Star, July 20, 1929, p.22.

administrative offices, a spacious reception foyer, comfortable lounges and smoking rooms, and the usual backstage dressing rooms.

From its earliest years until its demolition in 1963, His Majesty's Theatre (Her Majesty's from 1898-1901 and 1953-1963) remained Montreal's leading playhouse for touring musical attractions. Its first two seasons, under the direction of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Murphy featured several musicals, including the world première of the Victor Herbert operetta The Singing Girl.⁴⁶ Under the management of the J. B. Sparrow Theatrical and Amusement Company from 1903 to 1929, His Majesty's Theatre presented major musical productions originating in the United States and Great Britain. Shortly after the death of J.B. Sparrow in 1914, the playhouse was leased by W.A. Edwards and George Driscoll, who maintained its tradition for importing high-grade musical productions from Britain and the United States. During most of the postwar decade, His Majesty's Theatre was leased by Dr. Victor Mitchell, a prominent Montreal lawyer and financier.⁴⁷ In 1929, Mitchell relinquished his control of the playhouse to the Consolidated Theatres Corporation of Canada for the sum of \$190,000.⁴⁸

Many of the artists who performed at His Majesty's Theatre were accommodated at the Corona Hotel located next door to the playhouse. This Canadian equivalent of New York City's Algonquin Hotel offered its mainly show-business guests special facilities for

⁴⁶Dane Lanken, Montreal Movie Palaces: Great Theatres of the Golden Era 1884-1938 (Waterloo, Penumbra Press, 1993), p.34.

⁴⁷The Montreal Star, "The Coming Season," August 1, 1925, p.20.

⁴⁸La Patrie, "Le Majesty's à de nouveaux maitres," April 10, 1929, p.14.

after-theatre parties, including a large dance floor with an orchestra.⁴⁹ Its exclusive La Corona restaurant featured private supper-rooms and an attractive programme of live musical entertainment.⁵⁰ While the rank and file of touring musical roadshows was accommodated at the Corona Hotel, leading international stars, including Al Jolson, Sacha Guitry, Yvonne Printemps, Beatrice Lillie and Sir Harry Lauder sought hospitality at the luxurious Ritz-Carlton Hotel.⁵¹

Less prestigious but somewhat larger than His Majesty's Theatre was the Princess Theatre, which opened its doors at the corner of St. Catherine and City Councillors Streets in 1908. With its seating capacity of 2328, the Princess was by far the largest English-language playhouse in Montreal.⁵² The spacious theatre featured 811 orchestra seats, 701 balcony seats, 600 gallery seats, and 216 box seats.⁵³ Under the control of the Shubert Company from 1909 to 1917, the Princess presented theatrical, operatic, and musical comedy attractions.⁵⁴ In December 1917, the theatre was sold to Canadian United Theatres Limited, and transformed into a venue for high-class American vaudeville.⁵⁵ In March

⁴⁹Leonard Knott, Montreal 1900-1930, (Toronto, Nelson, Foster & Scott, 1976), p.50.

⁵⁰"Our Prince" The Souvenir Programme of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, Princess Theatre Program, October 29, 1919, McCord Museum Archives.

⁵¹Montreal Gazette, "Many Famous Personages Have Been Served at Ritz," October 16, 1940; See also Adrian Waller, No Ordinary Hotel: The Ritz-Carlton's First Seventy-Five Years, (Montreal, 1989), pp.81-96.

⁵²Oxford Companion to Canadian Theatre, p.432.

⁵³"Canadian United Theatres Limited Valuations," Shubert Archives, Theatres: Canada, Princess Theatre.

⁵⁴Oxford Companion to Canadian Theatre, p.432.

⁵⁵Ibid.

1926, the playhouse was again leased by the Shubert organisation, and became a major roadhouse for its American theatrical and musical productions.⁵⁶ In June 1929, however, the theatre's offerings of live entertainment ended when the building was acquired by the Consolidated Theatres Corporation and transformed into a cinema, to accommodate the new development of talking pictures.⁵⁷

Located in the east of the city centre on St. Denis Street, north of St. Catherine, the Saint-Denis Theatre was also a popular stage for foreign musical attractions during the 1920s. Inaugurated in March 1916 as a motion picture house, it had a seating capacity of 2,600, which made it the largest theatre auditorium in Quebec.⁵⁸ In addition to major feature films, the Saint-Denis presented vaudeville, opera, operetta, symphony concerts, and music hall shows. In 1925, the theatre was purchased by the Montreal theatrical entrepreneur Joseph Cardinal, who maintained its policy of alternating between films and live entertainment until the early 1930s.⁵⁹

⁵⁶"Contract Between Canadian United Theatres, Ltd. and Sam S. Shubert Amusement Company," New York, January 13, 1926, Shubert Archives, Canadian Theatres: Princess Theatre. Under this contractual agreement, the Princess Theatre was leased by the Shubert Company for the balance of the 1925-1926 season, effective March 8, 1926, and for ten consecutive theatrical seasons thereafter terminating on June 1, 1936. This contract was effectively cancelled when the Princess was purchased by the Consolidated Theatres Company in June 1929 and transformed into a cinema.

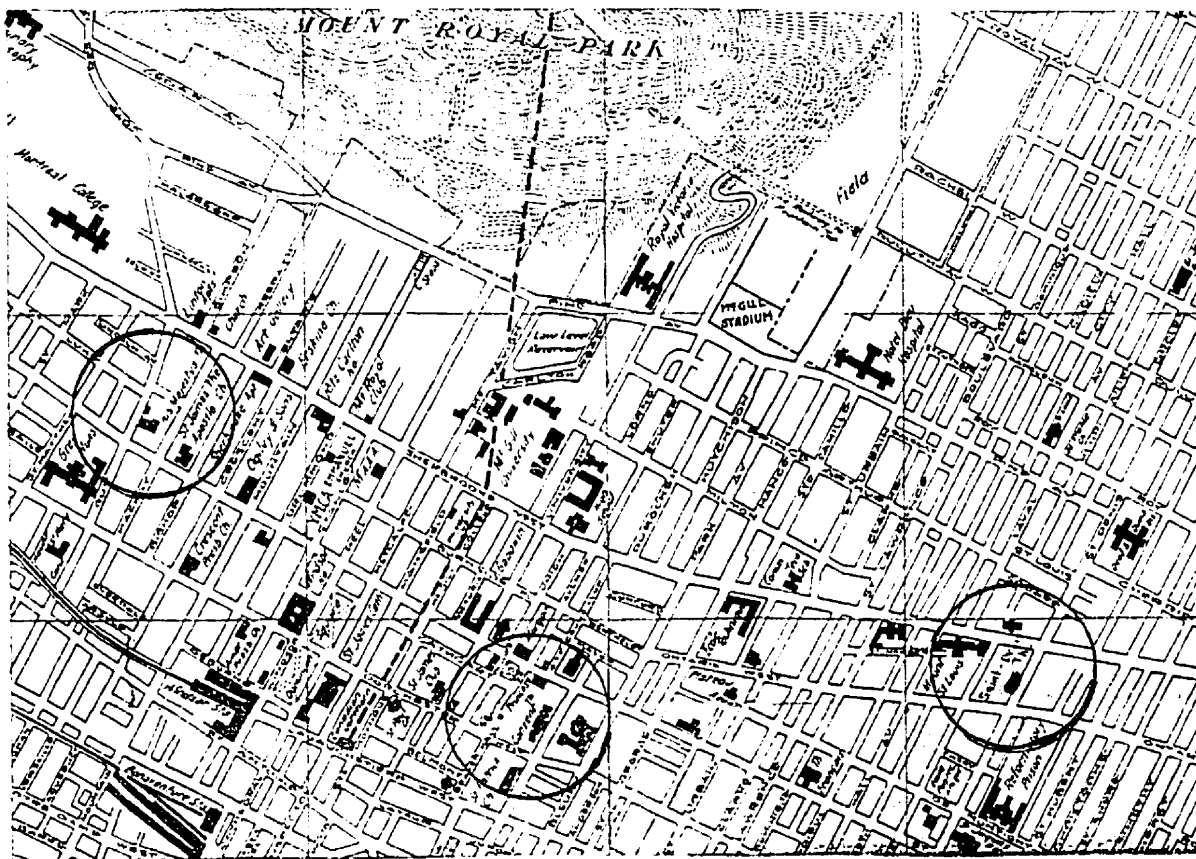
⁵⁷Oxford Companion to Canadian Theatre, p.432.; Montreal Star, June 22, 1929.

⁵⁸Helmut Kallmann, Encyclopedia of Music In Canada, (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1992), p.835.

⁵⁹Ibid.; Dane Lanken, p.69; La Patrie, "M. J. Cardinal dirigera le Théâtre Saint-Denis," May 30, 1925, p.36. In addition to His Majesty's, the Princess and the Saint-Denis Theatres, the St. Catherine Street Orpheum Theatre also occasionally presented musical theatre. Constructed in 1907 as a vaudeville house, the 1700-seat theatre served as a venue for French comedy and local stock in the 1920s. Under the direction of the Montreal opera

FIGURE I

Montreal's three leading playhouses in the 1920s. His Majesty's Theatre, the Princess Theatre and the Saint-Denis Theatre, were located in the city's downtown core.



Source: Sights and Shrines and official Guide to Montreal. (Montreal, Herald Press Limited.), 1919

Many prominent figures in the theatre community resided in the comfortable St. Andrew's ward in the west end of the city. This fashionable uptown apartment district was home to George Driscoll, the Vice President of the short-lived Trans-Canada Theatres

impresario Albert Gauvin, the New York National Civic Grand Opera and the de Feo Opera Company were brought to the playhouse during the 1924-1925 theatre season. During the second half of the decade, the Orpheum Theatre was the home of high-class English-language stock.

Organisation: Dr. Victor Mitchell, the President and chief financier of His Majesty's Theatre in the 1920s; Bert Lang, the manager-impresario of His Majesty's Theatre; Abbie Wright, the manager of the Princess Theatre; Samuel Morgan-Powell, the city's leading anglophone drama critic; Louis Bourdon, the city's foremost concert impresario; and Albert Gauvin, the opera impresario of the Saint-Denis and Orpheum Theatres.⁶⁰ While most of these professionals lived in modern apartment houses, Albert Gauvin operated from the fashionable Mount-Royal Hotel, conveniently only a short distance removed from the city's major playhouses.⁶¹

The Business Organisation of Montreal's Playhouses

During the 1920s, Montreal's lyric playhouses were operated as private business establishments by local manager-impresarii. These skilled professionals earned their living by serving as intermediaries between touring roadshow companies and local audiences. Prior to the opening of each theatrical season, Bert Lang of His Majesty's Theatre, Abbie Wright of the Princess Theatre, and Albert Gauvin for the Saint-Denis Theatre, travelled abroad to book attractions for their respective playhouses. When selecting productions for their upcoming theatre seasons, Montreal's theatre managers had to consider the particular tastes and social outlook of their clientele. Factors to be weighed included changes in public taste, preferred days of the week for theatre-going, and gala occasions or public

⁶⁰Lovell's Montreal Directory for 1925-1926.

⁶¹Ibid. During the 1920s, Samuel Morgan-Powell, Abbie Wright and Louis Bourdon all resided in the luxurious King George and Regent Apartment complexes of the St. Andrew's ward.

holidays for which to reserve special attractions.⁶² A closer look at the individual management and booking arrangements of each playhouse reveals the conditions under which some of the most popular musical shows in the world were brought to the Montreal stage.

From 1924 to 1929, His Majesty's Theatre was run by Bert Lang, a theatre manager of wide experience. Born in Washington State in 1882, Lang began his theatrical career as a programme boy in Victoria, British Columbia.⁶³ By the age of twenty-one, he was manager of his own theatre company, and one of the first Canadian impresarii to tour musical attractions across the Prairie West. In 1921, Lang became representative in Canada for English Shakespearean actor Sir John Martin-Harvey, and married a member of Martin-Harvey's touring company.⁶⁴ Shortly thereafter, Lang established, in conjunction with Martin-Harvey's business manager Frank O'Neill, the All-Canada Tours Agency, a Canadian booking agency devoted to the presentation of English productions in the Dominion.⁶⁵ In an interview granted to the Montreal Star in 1964, Lang recorded the following recollections regarding the booking of English attractions for His Majesty's Theatre in the 1920s:

When I was bringing over English shows I would book them almost a year ahead. Never later than April for the following season. They were

⁶²Bernheim, pp.112-113.

⁶³Montreal Herald, July 11, 1926, p.8.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Montreal Star, June 22, 1929.

expensive deals from the production standpoint. Practically all of them were set in London and they really built scenery over there."⁶⁶

Lang's British bookings were particularly important after 1925 when there was an interruption in the steady flow of American productions. For instance, in September 1925, Victor Mitchell, the President of His Majesty's Theatre cancelled the 1925-1926 season's bookings with the Shubert and Erlanger franchises because of a mounting financial deficit and local labour troubles. Although the playhouse's contract with the Erlanger organisation was renewed, Lang's British bookings proved invaluable to His Majesty's Theatre when Broadway shows were unavailable.

In order to secure up-scale British musical attractions, Lang had to extend the booking of their tours into the United States. As already noted, few European companies by the 1920s were willing to cross the Atlantic to perform solely in Canada without the added incentive of a lucrative tour of major American centres. For instance, the 1928-1929 tour of the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company was much longer in the United States than in Canada. In fact, the company's return engagement at His Majesty's Theatre in May 1929 was cut short because of an extension of its American bookings to such American cities as Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, San Diego and Salt Lake City, where it grossed respectable profits.⁶⁷ According to Lang, who toured the United States and Canada by plane, one jump ahead of the popular English company, "the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas packed houses right across the continent."⁶⁸

⁶⁶Montreal Star, "When Montreal Went for the "Mellers," article, September 5, 1964.

⁶⁷Montreal Herald, April 20, 1929, p.11; Montreal Star, May 4, 1929, p.18.

⁶⁸Montreal Herald, April 13, 1929, p.11.

Throughout the 1920s, the Princess Theatre was managed by Abbie Wright, a native of Brockville, Ontario, who assumed the managerial chair in 1915.⁶⁹ During his early years as manager, Wright exerted himself tirelessly to publicise the high-quality attractions sent to him by the Shuberts. His industry and energetic devotion is evident in the following message to Jake Shubert, the Vice-President of the Shubert Amusement Company. Wright's January 13, 1917 letter, read in part:

The sale for the "Passing Show" opened last Thursday and ever since we have had a continuous line at the Box Office window, and so far in actual cash the receipts exceed the advance sale for the Al Jolson Show. I broke into the newspapers yesterday with a front page story....I am going after business for this show through every possible medium and I feel sure that the results will even be better than those I got with the Jolson Show. I am doing everything possible to get a big Monday Night opening.⁷⁰

As a result of his competent work, Wright was maintained as the manager of the Princess Theatre during its nine years of operation (1917-1926) as a Keith-Albee vaudeville house. In early 1926, he welcomed the opportunity to return as manager of the Princess under the Shubert franchise.⁷¹ Under the terms of the January 13, 1926 contractual agreement reached between the Shubert Company and the Canadian United Theatres Ltd., as owners of the Princess, the Shuberts agreed to book the playhouse exclusively with up-

⁶⁹Montreal Herald, September 1, 1928, p.12; December 15, 1923, p.7.

⁷⁰Letter to Mr. J.J. Shubert, Sam S. Shubert Amusement Company from Abbie Wright, January 13, 1917; Shubert Archives, Canadian Theatres: Princess Theatre.

⁷¹Victor Mitchell's sudden cancellation of His Majesty's Theatre's booking contract with the Shubert Company in September 1925 was directly responsible for the Shubert Company's acquisition of the Princess Theatre at the end of the 1925-1926 theatre season.

scale attractions from March 8, 1926, and for the ten following theatre seasons.⁷² In exchange for this service, the Shuberts insisted on a 40% share of the theatre's net profits derived from every year of the agreement.⁷³

On January 16, 1926, only days after the contract was signed at the Shubert head offices in New York City, Wright proudly informed the Montreal Standard that the "Princess Theatre in the future will be devoted to the presentation of only the very best shows."⁷⁴ Wright's announcement to the press proved to be well-founded. Between the years 1926 and 1929, during which the Princess was a Shubert house, Wright obtained some of the most successful musicals produced by the Shubert organisation. Among the theatre's most popular bookings were the American operettas Rose Marie, Blossom Time, and The Student Prince, and the hit musical comedies Big Boy, Tip Toes, and Good News. Equally successful were the one-week runs of The Desert Song and Oh, Kay! in January 1928, which netted the house a very profitable return of \$60,000.⁷⁵

Unlike His Majesty's and the Princess, the Saint-Denis Theatre alternated between movies and live musical theatre entertainment in the 1920s. Accordingly, most of its musical attractions were booked by Albert Gauvin, Montreal's foremost operatic impresario.

⁷²Contract signed between the Shubert Amusement Company and Canadian United Theatres, Ltd., January 13, 1926, Shubert Archives, Canadian Theatres: Princess Theatre. Although this contract was cancelled when the Princess was sold to the Consolidated Theatres Company and wired for sound films in June 1929, its use as a Shubert venue from March 1926 until May 1929, increased by 75 the number of professional musical productions presented on the Montreal stage over the decade.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Montreal Standard, "Princess Theatre to Offer Legitimate Productions and Vaudeville to be Eliminated," January 16, 1926, p.41.

⁷⁵Variety, "Montreal," February 1, 1928, p.60.

Although biographical information about Gauvin is scanty, he appears to have begun booking attractions for each of the city's major playhouses at the close of the First World War. During the 1922-1923 theatre season, Gauvin brought three different opera companies to the Saint-Denis Theatre: the San Carlo Opera Company from New York; the Russian Grand Opera Company from Moscow; and the Troupe Française d'Opérette of Paris. Under his management, the New York National Civic Grand Opera and De Feo Grand Opera Companies were presented at the Orpheum Theatre in the 1924-1925 season.⁷⁶ In September 1926, he booked the San Carlo Opera Company for the Princess Theatre, marking the first time grand opera was offered at the Shubert playhouse.⁷⁷ During the 1929-1930 theatre season, the American Opera Company of New York was presented at His Majesty's Theatre under the auspices of Gauvin.

As the leading operatic impresario of Montreal, Gauvin travelled to Europe on a regular basis to secure operatic attractions for both Canada and the United States. As in the case of the English touring companies, most French theatrical troupes were unwilling to journey across the Atlantic to Canada, without also performing in the United States. This practice is illustrated by the visit of the Russian Grand Opera Company in 1922, which was brought to the Montreal stage by Gauvin, directly after a successful run in New York City.⁷⁸ The seven-week tour of the Compagnie d'Opérette de Paris at the Saint-Denis in early 1927

⁷⁶Encyclopedia of Music in Canada, p.717.

⁷⁷Montreal Star, August 21, 1926, p.18.

⁷⁸Transcontinental Tour - Russian Grand Opera Company, April 1923, Theatre Programme, McCord Museum Archives.

also came to Montreal direct from a six-week run on Broadway.⁷⁹ In a reversal of the usual pattern, Gauvin in 1929 organised a North American tour of the French Musical Comedy Company which played Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto before its one-month run at the Jolson Theatre in New York City.⁸⁰ In short, for a tour to hold out any promise of financial success, New York had usually to be included into the booking tours of European theatre companies.

While Albert Gauvin booked most of the city's foreign operatic repertoire, Louis-Honoré Bourdon was Montreal's foremost concert impresario. Born in Longueuil, on the south shore of the St. Lawrence river opposite Montreal, in 1891, Louis-Honoré Bourdon studied music in Belgium before embarking on a career as a concert impresario.⁸¹ From 1912 to 1930, he organised and managed over 200 concerts in Montreal, including that of the world-famous Italian tenor Enrico Caruso, who sang at the Mount Royal Arena on September 27, 1920.⁸² This memorable concert recital grossed \$28,700, which represented a record-breaking amount for a single evening engagement.⁸³ In the following year, Bourdon organised the North American concert tour of the celebrated French tenor Edmond Clémont. This triumphant tour marked the first occasion on which a Canadian impresario

⁷⁹La Patrie, "M. Salignac et les tournées françaises," editorial comment, March 16, 1927, p.14; Alexander Mason, French Theatre in New York: A List of Plays 1899-1939, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1940), p.24.

⁸⁰Mason, pp.364-366; Montreal Star, December 29, 1928, p.15.

⁸¹The Passing Show, "Experiences of an Impresario," January 1931, pp.9, 32.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ibid.; Le Devoir, "L'Impresario Louis-Honoré Bourdon," article, June 15, 1974, p.20. Caruso earned over \$20,000 from this concert, one of the largest profit-earnings of his career.

managed the concert itinerary of a European artist in both the United States and Canada.⁸⁴ During the 1920s, Bourdon brought to Montreal some of the world's greatest musicians, singers and dancers. Until his retirement in the early 1960s, Bourdon remained Quebec's leading independent musical impresario.

Once a musical attraction was securely booked it had to be properly publicised, often a number of weeks in advance of its Montreal première. To reach as wide a market as possible, local theatre managers resorted to the business strategy of newspaper advertising, and arranged for space in the dramatic pages of Montreal's daily newspapers. Most touring attractions were advertised in the Montreal Star, the Montreal Herald, the Montreal Gazette, La Presse, La Patrie, Le Canada, the Canadian Jewish Chronicle, and the popular entertainment weekly the Montreal Standard.

The most common form of newspaper publicity consisted of bills or boxed notices indicating the titles, origins and casts of upcoming productions (See Figure II). In addition to providing the dates and performance times of touring attractions, such boxed advertisements featured the range of different ticket prices available. Printed notices were generally inserted to run continuously for one to three weeks before the opening of a show, and lasted until the attraction's final performance.

⁸⁴Ibid.

FIGURE II

BOXED ADVERTISEMENT FOR THE AMERICAN OPERETTA
THE VAGABOND KING

PRINCESS
 PLAYING FOREMOST ATTRACTIONS

One Week Only Beginning Monday Eve.
 Note: Performances 8:10 Sharp. Wed.-Sat. Mat's 2:10
 CROWNING EVENT OF THE CURRENT THEATRICAL SEASON!

RUSSELL JANNEY presents -

The VAGABOND KING

Based on JUSTIN MCCARTHY'S 'IF I WERE KING'

Music by FRIML
 Complete New York Casino Production

With a Distinguished Cast Including
 CAROLYN THOMSON EDWARD NELL, Jr.
 WILL H. PHILBRICK H. COOPER CLIFFE

Chorus 60. Special Orchestra. Corps de Ballet.
 DIRECT FROM TRIUMPHS IN N. Y., CHICAGO, LONDON.
 PRICES: Nights—\$3 to \$4; Wed. Mat.—\$2 to 50c.
 Sat. Mat.—\$2.30 to 75c. (Plus Tax.)
 Free List Entirely Suspended.



Source: Montreal Standard, October 1, 1927, p.57

Certain theatre advertisements printed in the show-pages of Montreal's daily newspapers were somewhat misleading in nature. To draw more theatregoers to their playhouses, some theatre operators occasionally labelled their weaker shows as first-rate original cast productions direct from successful New York runs.⁸⁵ This dishonest practice was especially common during slack periods when the city received few first-class attractions. During the doldrums of the slow 1923-1924 theatre season, for example, a third-rate duplicate company of the American musical comedy, The Gingham Girl, was misrepresented as the original New York cast production by the management of His Majesty's Theatre.⁸⁶ So poor was the quality of this road company that Samuel Morgan-Powell of the Montreal Star remarked that "its cast contained hardly anybody who could sing."⁸⁷

Although some roadshows such as The Gingham Girl played Montreal without their complete original New York casts, the majority of musical productions sent to the city in the 1920s were of the same high quality and scale as those originally presented in New York City, Chicago, Boston, and other leading artistic centres.⁸⁸ Most musical productions toured Montreal following successful runs on Broadway. When popular and successful musical plays completed their lengthy New York runs, duplicate companies were assembled to meet the demands of the roadshow circuit. During the 1925-1926 theatre

⁸⁵Bernheim, p.80.

⁸⁶Montreal Star, March 29, 1924, p.22.

⁸⁷Ibid..

⁸⁸Montreal Star, August 21, 1926, p.18; September 17, 1927, p.22.

season, for example, there were ten different roadshow companies performing The Student Prince across the continent, one of which played an extended two-week engagement at the Princess Theatre in downtown Montreal.⁸⁹ As will be seen in Chapter Three, Montreal generally received road-tested material, and so avoided the disasters of Broadway.

In addition to paid advertising, free newspaper publicity came in the form of special stories, feature articles and the all-important critical review. Throughout the 1920s, the daily press of Montreal provided extensive coverage of the city's rich musical theatre life. The Montreal Star, Quebec's largest English-language daily, devoted substantial coverage to the various musical theatre companies touring through Montreal.

The Montreal Star's dramatic editor, Samuel Morgan-Powell, was a prolific writer with a very large following. Born in London in 1867, Powell joined the Star in 1907, and remained its drama and literary critic for thirty-five years.⁹⁰ As a resident of the fashionable St. Andrew's Ward in downtown Montreal, Powell lived within close proximity of the city's first-class playhouses, and attended almost all of their diverse dramatic and musical theatre offerings. Powell's drama column included feature interviews with visiting Broadway and London stars, letters from his numerous readers, and incisive reviews of musical shows. Until the outbreak of the Second World War, he remained the best-known critic in Montreal.

The Montreal Gazette, the Montreal Herald, and the Montreal Standard similarly carried commentary on the various musical roadshows passing through the city. Their

⁸⁹Poggi, p.21: The Student Prince played the Princess Theatre from March 8 to March 20, 1926.

⁹⁰Oxford Companion to Canadian Theatre, pp.348-349.

dramatic pages were filled with both local and international theatre news, and advance notes about upcoming attractions. The popular entertainment weekly, the Montreal Standard, provided extensive coverage of travelling Broadway shows, particularly in the form of elaborate picture spreads. It also advertised many of the French-language attractions presented at the Saint-Denis Theatre. For its part, the Canadian Jewish Chronicle also had a weekly theatre page in which it advertised both foreign touring productions and local offerings in Yiddish theatre. For instance, its January 28, 1927 issue promoted Al Jolson in the upcoming Broadway musical Big Boy as "The world's famous Jewish star."⁹¹

The English-language press was not alone in covering Montreal's vibrant musical theatre. La Presse, the largest French-language daily in North America, devoted substantial space to publicising and reviewing the various French- and English-language musical roadshows which toured Montreal. The French-language tabloid La Patrie provided very extensive coverage of the city's musical theatre life. Its leading drama critic, Jean Nolin, was an ardent theatregoer who especially enjoyed reviewing English-language American musical shows. La Patrie's dramatic columns carried special stories, feature articles and numerous pictures of leading theatrical personalities. This tabloid, for example, was the only newspaper in Montreal to print a photograph of the complete original cast of The White Eagle, during its pre-Broadway tour of Montreal in November 1927.⁹² The French-

⁹¹Canadian Jewish Chronicle, Boxed advertisement of "Big Boy," January 28, 1927, p.16.

⁹²La Patrie, November 21, 1927, p.14.

language musical bimonthly Le Canada Musical and the monthly La Lyre also reviewed foreign musical productions, particularly operas and operettas.⁹³

Although most foreign musicals played Montreal for a one-week run, or a total of six evening performances and two matinées, the engagements of some hit shows were occasionally extended to satisfy high public demand. In other words, the number of performances presented by musical roadshows in Montreal was determined by local market conditions. In March 1924, for instance, the management of His Majesty's Theatre, in response to public request, agreed to extend for one week the engagement of Nikita Balieff's sensational Chauve-Souris Russian revue. The cost of this extended run to His Majesty's Theatre was \$5,000.00, which was paid to the Shubert Theatre in Albany, where the show had been scheduled to open.⁹⁴ Theatrical entrepreneurs were willing to take financial risks, given a reasonable prospect of good box-office returns.

To enhance their box-office returns, Montreal theatre operators often secured return engagements of popular productions, most of which were operettas. For example, the extremely successful American operetta Rose-Marie appeared twice at the Princess Theatre in the first half of the 1926-1927 theatre season. During its single-week return engagement in December, it grossed \$30,000 for the box office of the Princess Theatre, which

⁹³Le Canada Musical, "Scotti et Sa Troupe d'Opera," October 2, 1920, p.9, 16; "La Saison d'Opérette," January 20, 1923, p.12; "Notre Saison Musicale," May 5, 1923; La Lyre, "Le Mois Théâtral," May 1926, p.5; La Musique à Montréal, "September 1926, p.27; "La Troupe d'Opéra du Saint-Denis," December 1928, p.7.

⁹⁴Montreal Herald, March 15, 1924, p.7.

represented for the period, a highly profitable return.⁹⁵ Blossom Time was another perennial favourite in Montreal, and as a Shubert production played eight different engagements in the city between 1922 and 1930.⁹⁶

During the 1920s, tickets to musical shows went on sale approximately two weeks before the opening night performance. Most theatre tickets were purchased directly at theatre box offices, which were open daily from 9:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m. Theatre tickets were also sold at hotels and at popular piano stores such as Lindsay's and Archambault's in downtown Montreal.

Many Montreal playgoers also purchased musical theatre tickets by mail order. While enthusiastic musical theatregoers subscribed to season tickets at the opening of each theatre season, others ordered tickets for individual performances based on the information contained in the boxed advertisements of upcoming shows placed in the entertainment pages of Montreal's daily newspapers. One such advertisement promoting the London musical revue Chu Chin Chow, read, in part:

We feel it is our duty to the citizens of Montreal to notify them that they should take immediate action if they wish to profit by the following announcement:-

We have just completed a contract with F. Ray Comstock and Morris Gest, producers of the world famous CHU CHIN CHOW, whereby that brilliant and gorgeous spectacle of ancient Baghdad, the world's most beautiful production, will positively appear at His Majesty's Theatre, week beginning Monday evening, January 26th.

⁹⁵Montreal Herald, September 3, 1927, p.10.

⁹⁶The American operetta Blossom Time was performed in Montreal during the weeks of October 16-21, 1922; February 5-10, 1923; October 27-November 1, 1924; March 22-27, 1926; November 8-13, 1926; March 19-24, 1928; February 18-23, 1929; and March 10-15, 1930.

Owing to intense interest in this engagement, MAIL ORDERS for this important theatrical event will now be received. Send remittance with self-addressed stamped envelope for return of tickets, and as there will unquestionably be an avalanche of mail orders, please name choice of two performances to insure getting seats.⁹⁷

All requests by mail for tickets had to be accompanied by cheque or money order.⁹⁸ Prepaid mail orders were processed by the box-office staff according to the sequence of their arrival.

At the Princess Theatre, telephone orders were given special attention. Seats reserved by phone were held until 1:30 p.m. for matinees, and until 7:30 p.m. for evening performances.⁹⁹

Ticket prices for musical attractions in postwar Montreal remained standard throughout the decade and generally varied from \$0.50 for the cheapest seats to \$3.50 for the most expensive, usually charged for Saturday night performances.¹⁰⁰ Admission to musical comedies ranged from \$1.00 to \$3.00 for evening performances, and from \$0.50 to \$2.00 for Wednesday and Saturday matinees, depending on the scale and popularity of the production. For instance, matinee tickets to the popular musical Big Boy starring Al Jolson ranged in price from \$1.00 to \$2.50.¹⁰¹ While tickets for week-end evening seats in the stalls generally sold for \$3.00, gallery seats were available for as little as fifty cents, which

⁹⁷Montreal Star, January 10, 1920, p.24.

⁹⁸His Majesty's Theatre Program, 19, May 27, 1929, McCord Museum Archives.

⁹⁹Montreal Standard, August 22, 1926, p.31.

¹⁰⁰Montreal Star, February 1, 1919, p.24; July 9, 1927, p.14; July 30, 1927, p.20.

¹⁰¹Canadian Jewish Chronicle, boxed advertisement for "Big Boy," January 28, 1927, p.16.

was about double the admission price to a popular motion picture. This range in ticket prices enabled Montrealers of all social classes to attend musical shows.

Montreal's Musical Theatre Audiences

Like New York City, Montreal in the 1920s was home to a critical mass of music-lovers drawn from all sections of the social spectrum. The city's diverse musical theatre repertoire attracted both rich and poor, as well as the emerging consumer middle class. The show-going public of Montreal included eminent businessmen and statesmen; doctors, lawyers, and other professionals; men and women of affluence; and those who earned their living in labouring and unskilled vocations.

The city's most regular theatre patrons belonged to the prominent business families of the luxurious Golden Square Mile. As already noted, this fashionable area was home to the Holts, Drummonds, Molsons, and many other wealthy Canadian families. The comfortable lifestyles favoured by these affluent families included frequent visits to the theatre.¹⁰²

Not all wealthy Montrealers, however, attended musical productions out of a genuine love for music and a search for pleasure. Many well-to-do citizens went to the theatre because this was considered a fashionable and socially prestigious thing to do. By tradition, an appreciation of music was a hallmark of the educated, refined, and leisured moneyed classes. Lyric playhouses enabled socially eminent Montrealers to consort with their peers and make a fashion statement: affluent male theatregoers attended in full formal

¹⁰²Murray Ballantyne, All or Nothing (New York, Sheed & Ward, 1956), p.49.

evening dress, while their female companions were decked out in the latest in European haute couture, set off by luxurious fur coats of mink, sable, and silver fox in winter-time.¹⁰³

Upper-class Montrealers generally attended musical shows on Friday and Saturday evenings, which were also the nights favoured by out-of-town visitors.¹⁰⁴ Given the close proximity of the Square Mile to the city's first-class playhouses, some wealthy patrons simply walked to the theatre. Others made their way there in chauffeur-driven limousines and taxis.¹⁰⁵ The De Luxe Cab Company furnished exclusive taxi service to His Majesty's Theatre.¹⁰⁶

Upper-class patrons usually observed musical productions from private boxes or front row orchestra seats. Theatre box seats cost over \$3.00 a seat, a price which only the wealthy could afford.¹⁰⁷ Theatre boxes enabled prominent families or groups of friends to sit together as a socially exclusive party, and to illustrate their privileged place in society. Regular box-holders at His Majesty's Theatre included Sir Frederick and Lady Williams Taylor, Sir Vincent and Lady Meredith, Sir Henry and Lady Thornton, Lady Drummond, Mr. and Mrs. John Wilson McConnell, Edward Beatty, and many other members of the commercial and social elites of Montreal.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Author's private interview with Lea Roback, April 8, 1994.

¹⁰⁴ Montreal Star, February 1, 1919, p.24.

¹⁰⁵ Author's private interview with Lea Roback, April 8, 1994.

¹⁰⁶ His Majesty's Theatre Program, Program #19, May 27, 1929.

¹⁰⁷ Author's private interview with Lea Roback, April 4, 1995.

¹⁰⁸ Montreal Herald, November 15, 1924, p.8.

When box seats were unavailable, affluent patrons reserved front row orchestra seats. During performances, lady patrons were required to remove their hats, so as not to obstruct the vision of those spectators seated directly behind them.¹⁰⁹ During intermission, most patrons assembled in the lounge to drink, smoke, exchange gossip and display their latest fashions. While many women went to the Ladies' Room to freshen up, male patrons often discussed business.¹¹⁰

Although upper-class Montrealers were regular playgoers, many failed to arrive punctually at the theatre, according to Samuel Morgan-Powell. As early as September 1919, Powell bitterly denounced wealthy Montrealers for their tardiness. "There can be no possible excuse," Powell insisted, "for not reaching the theatre on time. I am frank to admit that box patrons are the worst offenders in this respect."¹¹¹ Powell was equally disturbed by the unpleasant practice of leaving the theatre before the fall of the final curtain, to the accompaniment of the National Anthem. Despite Powell's protests, many wealthy Montrealers continued to appear at the theatre late and to depart early.

Affluent theatregoers were not punctual because they often attended dinner parties before a visit to the theatre.¹¹² As in New York City, Montreal's downtown playhouses were surrounded by a variety of high-class restaurants, which catered to theatregoers by

¹⁰⁹Princess Theatre Program #29, April 8, 1929; His Majesty's Theatre Program #19, May 27, 1929, McCord Museum Archives.

¹¹⁰Author's private interview with Lea Roback, April 4, 1995.

¹¹¹Montreal Star, September 13, 1919, p.24.

¹¹²Montreal Star, February 1, 1919, p.24; July 9, 1927, p.14; July 30, 1927, p.20; January 14, 1928, p.22.

offering Continental cuisine both before and after shows. One of the city's most fashionable restaurants was La Corona, located next door to His Majesty's Theatre, and an easy five-minute walk from the Princess. Situated on the premises of the Guy Street Corona Hotel, this exclusive restaurant featured special facilities for theatre parties, such as private supper rooms and a live orchestra.¹¹³ Among its regular guests were many of the touring American and British theatrical celebrities performing at His Majesty's and the Princess Theatres.¹¹⁴ La Corona Restaurant was one of the few social settings in Montreal where affluent theatregoers might expect to mix with leading celebrities of show business.

Wealthy playgoers also dined at the St. Regis Restaurant, adjoining the Princess Theatre. Like La Corona, this high-class restaurant was specially adapted for private suppers and theatre parties.¹¹⁵ The Richelieu Restaurant was another popular downtown locale for late-night dining. Located in Phillips Square, just below St. Catherine Street, the Richelieu served French haute cuisine both before and after shows.¹¹⁶

With regards to their musical theatre preferences, upper-class Montrealers tended to patronise mainly American and British operetta. The large-scale American operettas of Sigmund Romberg and Rudolf Friml, with their spectacular scenery, sentimental waltzes and large orchestras, were particularly popular among older refined Montrealers. The Sigmund Romberg operetta Blossom Time, for instance, remained consistently popular

¹¹³"Our Prince" The Souvenir Programme of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, Princess Theatre Program, October 29, 1919, McCord Museum Archives.

¹¹⁴Knott, p.50.

¹¹⁵His Majesty's Theatre Program #19, May 27, 1929, McCord Museum Archives.

¹¹⁶Ibid.

among affluent Montrealers. Its fairyland settings, colourful costumes and romantic melodies offered its audiences a temporary escape from the busy, fast-paced pressures of modern urban life. According to Samuel Morgan-Powell, the audience for the February 5, 1923 return engagement of Blossom Time contained "many who had seen the operetta before and who found new delights in both the music and the interpretation of the new company."¹¹⁷ The seven return engagements of Blossom Time over the course of the 1920s, illustrate the popularity of operetta among Montrealers, who often attended particular productions more than once.

In addition to American operetta companies, British troupes on tour found ready acceptance among the affluent in Montreal, especially those who had family connections with the British Isles. In 1921, 10% of Montreal's population was British-born.¹¹⁸ The transatlantic tours of the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company in 1927-1928 and 1928-1929 were very well attended by British-born playgoers, and admirers of Gilbert and Sullivan packed His Majesty's Theatre to near capacity levels. The morning after the D'Oyly Carte Company's opening night performance of "The Mikado," Samuel Morgan-Powell for the Montreal Star wrote that the Company "aroused a great audience to a remarkable pitch of enthusiasm, and left behind none but the most delightful of memories."¹¹⁹ The D'Oyly Carte repertoire of Gilbert and Sullivan works no doubt held reminiscent echoes for Montrealers born during the Victorian era. The pointed satire of Gilbert's lyrics, coupled

¹¹⁷Montreal Star, February 6, 1923, p.6.

¹¹⁸Lloyd Reynolds, "The Occupational Adjustment of the British Immigrant in Montreal," (M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1933), pp.1, 43.

¹¹⁹Montreal Star, January 5, 1927, p.8.

with the tripping melodies of Sullivan's scores, must have struck a chord of nostalgic memory to those ageing theatregoers who recalled the heyday of Empire before 1914. While some patrons attended with their spouses, others brought their children and grandchildren to see the world-famous opera company. The D'Oyly Carte Company also regaled members of Montreal's amateur operatic societies.

Not all of Montreal's theatregoers however, were from the city's wealthy and predominantly anglophone capitalist establishment. The great bulk of Montreal's theatre audiences came from the city's middle classes, both English- and French-speaking. The 1920s were generally good years for middle-class Montrealers. Although they did not enjoy the lavish resources of the millionaire magnates of the upper establishment, most enjoyed a high standard of living and resided in such comfortable residential districts as Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, Montreal West and Outremont, all of which were within easy access of downtown recreational life. As middle-class Montrealers became more affluent, they sought a greater diversity of entertainment. Among the more popular diversions available to this pleasure-seeking social class were the various musical attractions presented daily at His Majesty's, the Princess, and the Saint-Denis Theatres.

It appears that many middle-class playgoers went to the theatre out of habit. Before the turn of the century, English and French-speaking businessmen, brokers, doctors, lawyers, teachers, students and other white-collar professionals had been casual or occasional patrons of the lyric theatre.¹²⁰ As they climbed the financial and social ladder, these middle-class Montrealers became habitual weekly playgoers. By the 1920s, most

¹²⁰Montreal Herald, September 5, 1925, p.11.

middle-class theatregoers were middle-aged holders of permanent seat reservations and season tickets.¹²¹

While many middle-class Montrealers went to the theatre for entertainment and pleasure, some attended out of curiosity, or to mingle with high society. His Majesty's, the Princess and the Saint-Denis Theatres were central meeting places for the fashionable elite. Some aspiring middle-class Montrealers frequented these playhouses to enhance their social standing and to socialise with members of Montreal's business establishment.¹²² In short, downtown playhouses were fashionable places to be seen.

In imitation of upper-class playgoers, many middle-class Montrealers waited until the second half of the week before going to the theatre. Thursday, Friday and Saturday evening performances were particularly popular among affluent theatregoers.¹²³ English and French-speaking businessmen, lawyers, notaries, accountants and other professionals attended musical shows after mid-week with their wives, and occasionally, with their children.

Although anglophone Montrealers constituted the bulk of West End playgoers, bilingual French Canadians also attended English-language musical attractions. While there is very little or no evidence to prove this statistically, the extensive coverage given to international shows in the city's French-language daily press implies that American shows were just as popular among francophones as among English-speaking Montrealers. The

¹²¹Ibid.

¹²²Taubman, pp.268-270; Author's private interview with Lea Roback, April 8, 1994.

¹²³Montreal Herald, May 9, 1925, p.7.

enthusiastic reviews of touring Broadway musicals in La Patrie, La Presse, and occasionally in Le Canada strongly suggest that Montreal francophones were particularly fond of American musical comedy. In September 1925, a theatre reviewer for the Montreal Herald noted that "many of the attractions which come here, especially of the spectacle or musical comedy kind, can get some support from the French-speaking people."¹²⁴

In contrast to Montreal's affluent upper- and middle-class communities, the city's working-class population worked long hours for their subsistence and had little time or money available for leisure pursuits. To attract more working-class customers to their recreational establishments, Montreal entertainment operators therefore offered a variety of amusements at popular prices. With tickets at 25 cents or less, cinemas were especially popular among the working-class public. By the mid-1920s, over 50,000 Montrealers were viewing motion pictures each day.¹²⁵ In addition to full-length dramatic film features, vaudeville was also available at popular prices. For a mere 10 to 50 cents per person, working-class families could attend vaudeville shows at the Loews, the Imperial, and until 1926, the Princess Theatre. Moreover, at the St. Catherine Street Gayety Theatre, burlesque performances ran all week, with daily matinee shows offered for as little as 25 cents.¹²⁶

Since most working-class Montrealers earned less than \$20.00 a week, they could not afford the prices of \$2.00 to \$3.00 charged for late-night theatre. To attract Montreal's working-class public, His Majesty, the Princess and the Saint-Denis Theatres offered

¹²⁴Montreal Herald, "Whole Theatrical Situation in Montreal May be Changed During the Coming Season," September 5, 1925, p.11.

¹²⁵Montreal Herald, August 29, 1925, p.9.

¹²⁶La Patrie, September 22, 1923, p.30.

popular matinee performances on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons. While ticket prices for week-end evening performances ranged from \$2.00 to \$3.00 maximum, gallery seats for matinees were available for 50 cents, which was about twice the price of admission to a popular motion picture. Although often located in the uppermost reaches of the theatre, gallery seats enabled working-class Montrealers to attend elaborate musical shows, which would otherwise have been beyond their financial reach.

Matinee performances on Wednesday and more especially Saturdays generally attracted a cross-section of Montreal's working-class population. Musical theatre matinees were especially attended by working women such as secretaries, clerks, and shop assistants, and other skilled or semi-skilled workers. Saturday matinees were especially popular among secretaries, after their five-and-a-half day work-week.¹²⁷ Saturday matinees also attracted out-of-town visitors from Toronto, Ottawa, Quebec City and the United States.¹²⁸

In addition to working-class English and French Canadians, recently arrived British and European immigrants to Montreal also attended popular matinees.¹²⁹ British-born Montrealers particularly enjoyed English musical productions, which exploited their nostalgia for their country of origin. Another important sub-division of the Montreal musical theatre public was the Jewish community that supported the thriving Yiddish

¹²⁷Gerald Bordman, *American Musical Comedy: From Adonis to Dreamgirls* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1982), p.118.

¹²⁸Author's private interview with Lea Roback, April 4, 1995.

¹²⁹Author's private interview with Lea Roback, April 4, 1995.

theatre, which included musical plays.¹³⁰ Musical theatre, in fact, was an integral part of the North American Jewish cultural experience.

In summary, the musical stage of Montreal in the 1920s was largely controlled by the Shubert and Erlanger booking organisations of New York, which regarded the Quebec metropolis as a profitable northern satellite of the United States for theatrical purposes. In the period from 1920 to 1930, the managements of both His Majesty's and the Princess Theatres were dependent on these American theatre organisations for the supply of musical attractions. Business decisions taken by the American booking agencies, such as the Shubert acquisition of the Princess Theatre in 1926, directly affected the musical theatre life of Montreal.

Montreal theatre operators were also dependent upon New York as a clearing-house for booking arrangements with European productions embarking on tours of North American centres. During this final successful decade of large-scale touring companies, few European companies were willing to cross the Atlantic to perform solely in Canada, without the added incentive of a lucrative booking on Broadway. Whether they were French, British or Russian, New York City had to be included in the booking tours of most travelling European theatre companies. This arrangement benefited theatre managers, who often advertised upcoming musical attractions in the local press as being "Direct From New York."

Despite this foreign domination, the 1920s were generally rewarding years for Montrealers seeking live theatrical entertainment. Throughout the decade, Montreal was

¹³⁰ Author's private interview with Lea Roback, April 4, 1995; Pierre Anctil, Mervin Butovsky & Ira Robinson (eds.), An Everyday Miracle: Yiddish Culture in Montreal

home to three large playhouses for musical theatre which could together accommodate more than 6,500 theatregoers. While His Majesty's Theatre presented a combination of American and British shows, the Princess Theatre offered an exclusive repertoire of the latest American musical hits of the powerful Shubert chain. The Saint-Denis, which alternated between movies and theatre, featured mainly operatic productions from France and the United States. Although the musical productions presented in these playhouses attracted Montrealers from all classes of society, most of the city's theatre audiences came from the financial elite and the growing middle class, whether English- or French-speaking. While some playgoers attended musical productions out of habit or curiosity, others were motivated by a genuine love for lyric art and the city's rich musical theatre repertoire. It is to an examination of the different kinds of musical shows performed in Montreal in the 1920s that this study now turns.

CHAPTER THREE:

MONTREAL'S MUSICAL THEATRE REPERTOIRE IN THE 1920s

When I first encountered the theatre, it was entirely an imported pleasure, and I never heard anyone say a word of regret that it was so. Canada imported pineapples and it imported plays for the same reason: such things were appreciated here but they were not of Canadian growth.

- Robertson Davies¹

The 1920s were among the most vibrant years in the musical theatre history of Montreal. Throughout this decade, Montreal was Canada's gateway for dozens of foreign companies and international stars. From France came the Troupe d'Opérette de Paris, the Compagnie Française d'Opérette, and the Modern French Musical Comedy Company. Great Britain sent a number of popular West End revues from London as well as the world-famous D'Oyly Carte Opera Company, whose Gilbert and Sullivan repertory absolutely delighted Canadian audiences. Montreal welcomed Nikita Balieff's sensational *Chauve-Souris Revue*, and the Russian Grand Opera Company. From the United States came the San Carlo Opera Company and dozens of acclaimed Broadway musicals. While most of these American attractions came to the metropolis as part of their North American road tours following successful runs on Broadway, some were pre-Broadway previews, preparing for their gala New York openings. In no decade before or after, was Montreal's musical stage more richly diverse.

¹Robertson Davies, "Mixed Grill: Touring Fare In Canada, 1920-1930," in L.W. Conolly ed.), Theatrical Touring and Founding in North America, (London, Greenwood Press, 1982), p.41.

The aim of this third chapter is to analyse the international nature and genre diversity of Montreal's musical theatre repertoire in the 1920s. Throughout this decade, the musical stage of Montreal was dominated by American, French, British and Russian musical attractions, direct from tours of New York City. Montreal's unique role as a northern satellite of Broadway readily reveals itself through a systematic survey of the four principal forms of musical theatre production mounted in the city: operetta, opera, musical comedy, and revue. In addition to examining these various forms of musical theatre, including the distinct national styles within each genre, this chapter also explores public reactions to certain musical shows. Accordingly, a number of important musical productions are examined in close detail. Scrutiny of contemporary press reports suggests that most of the city's musical theatre repertoire was of high quality, and appealed to Montrealers across linguistic and cultural lines.

The Historical Development of Musical Theatre

Before examining the diverse nature of Montreal's musical theatre repertoire of the 1920s, it is necessary to clearly define and outline the historical development of the four principal genres of musical theatre performed in the city. Although all four genres consisted of staged presentations with a musical setting, a number of characteristics distinguish them from one another.

Opera is somewhat difficult to define with precision, but a number of characteristics distinguish it from other musical genres. Unlike operetta, musical comedy and revue, opera is large-scale drama set to continuous music, with little spoken exchanges. Opera is highly

emotional, and consists mainly of a succession of solo songs or arias.² Traditionally, this older and more elitist musical art form has appealed to the wealthiest elements of society.³

The beginnings of opera in its modern form can be traced back to 1637, when the first public opera house was inaugurated in Venice.⁴ By the end of the seventeenth century, it had spread from Italy to France, England and Germany. In each of these countries, it took on cultural and linguistic colouration to adapt to the particular national tradition involved. For instance, in late seventeenth-century France, the court composer Jean-Baptiste Lully established a distinctively French style of opera which lasted for one hundred years.⁵ Mozart's struggle to adapt operatic conventions to the German language is well known. Over the course of the eighteenth century, opera developed into two basic types: *opera seria* or serious opera, and *opera bouffe* or comic opera. While *opera seria* gained prominence under the German composer Christoph Gluck, *opera bouffe* flourished under Amadeus Mozart, who wrote works in both German and Italian.⁶

After Mozart's comic opera, the next major development in music drama was the grand opera, which became very popular in France in the first half of the nineteenth century. In contrast to comic opera, grand opera was often highly dramatic, with settings in medieval times or remote historical periods. In addition to romantic arias, grand operas

²Donald Grout, A Short History of Opera, Volume I (New York, Columbia University Press, 1947), p.6.

³John Roselli, The Opera Industry in Italy from Cimarosa to Verdi: The Role of the Impresario, (London, Cambridge University Press, 1984), p.12.

⁴Grout, p.84.

⁵Grout, p.118.

⁶Ethan Mordden, The Splendid Art of Opera, (New York, Methuen, 1980), pp.76-88; Grout, p.222.

featured large choral ensembles, colourful ballets, and grand finales.⁷ The leading composers of grand opera included Giacomo Meyerbeer and Gioacchino Rossini.

During the mid and late 1800s, Italian opera reached its prominence, under the great Italian composer Giuseppe Verdi. During his prolific career, Verdi produced a series of masterpieces, including Rigoletto (1851), Il Trovatore (1853), La Traviata (1853), and Aida (1871), which brought Italian opera to its greatest heights.⁸ Italian composers continued to dominate the opera scene in the early twentieth century. Giacomo Puccini was one of the most important opera composers in the early 1900s. His Manon Lescaut (1893), La Bohème (1896), Tosca (1900), and Madame Butterfly (1904) became perennial favourites in Montreal as well as in all the major cities of the world.⁹

Operetta emerged in mid-nineteenth-century France, and appealed to all classes of theatregoing society. The primary function of operetta was essentially to entertain. As a rule, both the music and the subjects presented in operetta were much lighter than grand opera. While opera music was generally tragic and heavy, operetta was fundamentally romantic, and featured memorable melodies, sentimental waltzes and stirring marches.¹⁰ Unlike musical comedies and revues which remained focused on contemporary life, operettas were most often set in remote times and exotic locales.¹¹ The plot lines of the

⁷Grout, p.312.

⁸Mordden, pp.210-224.

⁹Grout, pp.344-355.

¹⁰Gerald Bordman, American Operetta: From H.M.S. Pinafore to Sweeney Todd (New York, Oxford University Press, 1981), pp.6, 93; Richard Traubner, Operetta: A Theatre History, (London, Victor Gollancz, 1984), p.377.

¹¹Gerald Bordman, American Musical Comedy: From Adonis to Dreamgirls (New York, Oxford University Press, 1982), pp.4,79; Gerald Bordman, American Musical Revue: From the Passing Show to Sugar Babies, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1985), p.54.

majority of operettas were frivolous in nature, and revolved around mistaken identity, deception, and romantic life.¹² Many featured handsome men in uniform and pretty aristocratic ladies. Unhappy endings were uncommon.

The French composer Jacques Offenbach is generally credited with having created operetta. During his prolific thirty-five year career, Offenbach wrote more than ninety works, the majority of which were operettas.¹³ His first great success Orpheus in the Underworld (1858), served as a model for an entire generation of operetta composers in both Europe and North America.

Outside France, operetta particularly flourished in Austria, Great Britain and the United States. In Austria, the Viennese composers Johann Strauss Jr. and Franz Von Suppé gained international reputations with their sentimental melodies and stirring marches. In Great Britain, composer Arthur Sullivan and librettist William Gilbert produced a dozen operettas within a twenty-five year period (1871-1896), which appealed to all classes of English society.¹⁴ The comic operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan were also immensely popular in North America. Indeed, the positive reception given to European operettas in New York stimulated the development of local creative efforts. By the end of the nineteenth century, the American composers John Phillip Sousa and Victor Herbert had begun to produce their own operettas. Operetta dominated Broadway until the First World War.¹⁵ Although it was ultimately supplanted by musical comedy as the most popular

¹²Gerald Bordman, American Musical Comedy, p.81.

¹³Richard Traubner, pp.26-45.

¹⁴Ibid., pp.150-185.

¹⁵Bordman, American Operetta, p.102.

musical form, operetta regained some of its popularity during the 1920s under the American composers Sigmund Romberg and Rudolf Friml.¹⁶

The term "musical comedy" emerged in the 1890s to describe the new musical entertainment in the United States that developed largely out of European operetta. Musical comedies were comic plays with songs, dances and incidental music. Unique to this new musical genre were the modern song-and-dance numbers interspersed in and around the comic plots.¹⁷ Most musical comedy plots were frivolous in nature, and served above all to provide a dramatic framework on which could be sung twenty or more musical numbers. Unlike operetta, which generally dealt with romantic situations and took its audiences to exotic locales and times, musical comedy was modern, fast-paced, humorous, and youthful.¹⁸

As the casts of musical comedies were generally smaller than those of operettas, many relied upon star performers like Eddie Cantor, Marilyn Miller or Al Jolson. In fact, some musical comedies were designed to serve as vehicles for popular artists.¹⁹ For example, the hit musical comedy Big Boy, which played Montreal in February 1927, was produced for Al Jolson, the Shubert organisation's greatest star and money-maker.²⁰

American musical comedy emerged as a distinctive musical form at the turn of the twentieth century. The musical output of George M. Cohan and Victor Herbert are fine

¹⁶Ibid., p.120; Traubner, p.377.

¹⁷Bordman, American Musical Comedy, p.14.

¹⁸Ibid., pp.4, 7.

¹⁹Ibid., p.131.

²⁰Jerry Stagg, The Brothers Shubert, (New York, Random House, 1968), p.169.

examples of early American musical theatre. During the second decade of the twentieth century, American musical comedy reached its full maturity under the New York-born composer Jerome Kern. Kern's shows carefully integrated story, song, and lyrics, and established the standard for the modern postwar American musical comedy.²¹ During the 1920s, Kern composed such outstanding works as Sally (1920), Sitting Pretty (1924), Sunny (1925), and Show Boat (1927). The American composers Fred Coots, George Gershwin, Cole Porter, Richard Rodgers, Herbert Stothart, Harry Tierney, and Vincent Youmans also wrote a number of notable musical comedies during the decade.²²

In addition to opera, operetta, and musical comedy, the musical revue also flourished in the early decades of the twentieth century. Unlike musical comedies, revues were assemblages of musical and comedy numbers without the linkage of any dramatic story line. Their fast-paced jazz scores and dance numbers epitomised the hedonistic 1920s. Whether in New York, London, Paris, or Berlin, musical revues were held together by different scenes, skits and songs which often satirised current events and personalities, as well as the latest trends in the arts. For instance, the 1919 edition of the Ziegfeld Follies ridiculed the Volstead Act in the song "You Cannot Make Your Shimmy Shake on Tea."²³ For their part, the George White Scandals made fun of contemporary Broadway, political

²¹Robert Toll, On With the Show, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1976), pp.202-203; Gerald Bordman, American Musical Comedy, pp.93-94, 105; American Operetta, p.105.

²²Samuel Leiter, The Encyclopedia of the New York Stage 1920-1930, (Westport, Greenwood Press, 1985), p.xxvi.

²³Bordman, American Musical Revue, p.44.

corruption, crime and divorces.²⁴ During the 1920s, over one hundred revues were produced in North America alone.²⁵

Musical revues were far more expensive to mount than musical comedies because they featured lavish stage-sets, sumptuous décor, and long lines of chorus girls. An essential ingredient of most musical revues was feminine beauty.²⁶ The attractive women appearing in revues in the 1920s wore expensive costumes, and promoted the latest fashions.²⁷ In short, revues promoted and glamorised conspicuous consumption.

The Musical Theatre Repertoire of Montreal

The body of this chapter (see Appendix I) rests on a systematic inventory of all professional musical productions presented over the course of the 1920s at His Majesty's, the Princess, and the Saint-Denis Theatres. These three playhouses were Montreal's leading venues for up-scale foreign musical productions. The musical productions mounted at these three theatres have been classified by genre and national origin. Local amateur and semi-professional musical productions were also mounted in Montreal during the 1920s, but have been ignored as outside the central topic of this dissertation.

Table I offers a general overview of Montreal's musical repertoire during the ten consecutive theatre seasons from August 1920 to June 1930. Over the course of this period, a total of 368 musical productions were staged at Montreal's three major playhouses. The

²⁴*Ibid.*, pp.75-76.

²⁵Robert Baral, *Revue: The Great Broadway Period*, (New York, Fleet Press, 1962), p.14.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p.10.

²⁷Glenn Loney, *Musical Theatre in America*, (Westport, Greenwood Press, 1984), p.154; Robert Toll, *On With the Show*, p.295.

foreign nature of Montreal's musical theatre is clearly evident. As will be seen, Montreal remained throughout the 1920s, a mere tributary of foreign stages, particularly Broadway.

TABLE I
MONTREAL'S MUSICAL THEATRE REPERTOIRE 1920-1930
AS PRESENTED AT
HIS MAJESTY'S, THE PRINCESS AND THE SAINT-DENIS THEATRES

ORIGIN	GENRE				total
	musical comedy	revue	operetta	opera	
U.S.A.	44	19	40	82	185
FRANCE	12	0	68	19	99
BRITAIN	1	12	23	4	40
RUSSIA	0	4	0	24	28
CANADA	0	16	0	0	16
TOTAL	57	51	131	129	368

Source: Table I compiled by author following a systematic analysis of the entertainment pages of the Montreal Star and La Patrie, 1920-1930.

Of the 368 musical productions presented in Montreal over the course of the 1920s, a total of 185 or 50.2% were American in origin, followed by 99 productions from France (26.9%), 40 from Great Britain (10.8%), 28 from Russia (7.6%), and 16 from Canada (4.3%). As at the turn of the century, the majority of professional musical attractions presented on the Montreal stage in the 1920s were produced in the United States.

The vast majority of these American musical productions were staged at His Majesty's and the Princess Theatres, the city's two leading English-language playhouses. The number of American shows playing Montreal increased significantly in the second half of the decade when the Princess Theatre was transformed from a vaudeville house into a major venue for the Shubert organisation. Table II reveals that between March 1926 and June 1929, 55 American musical attractions were staged at this Shubert playhouse. These

55 productions constituted about one third of the city's total American repertoire. During this same period, His Majesty's Theatre mounted 32 American musical attractions. Thus, in the second half of the 1920s, the Princess Theatre surpassed His Majesty's Theatre as Montreal's leading venue for first-class American musical productions.

TABLE II

MUSICAL REPERTOIRE OF THE PRINCESS THEATRE, 1925-1929

ORIGIN	<u>GENRE</u>				total
	musical comedy	revue	operetta	opera	
U.S.A.	14	6	21	14	55
FRANCE	9	0	5	0	14
BRITAIN	0	1	0	0	1
RUSSIA	0	1	0	0	1
CANADA	0	4	0	0	4
TOTAL	23	12	26	14	75

Source: Table II compiled by author following a systematic analysis of the entertainment pages of the Montreal Star and La Patrie, March 1926 - June 1929.

Table III indicates that far more American attractions played His Majesty's Theatre than British. Although His Majesty's Theatre was Montreal's foremost venue for British attractions, 106 or 63% of its repertoire during the 1920s was American. Even when combined, European productions were outnumbered by American attractions by a ratio of two to one. As mentioned in Chapter Two, very few European theatrical troupes were willing to visit Canada without extending their tour to include the United States. Accordingly, nearly all the European companies that played Montreal, did so only after a

Broadway run. His Majesty's dependency on American roadshows further illustrates the city's satellite status as a mere northern extension of Broadway.

TABLE III

MUSICAL REPERTOIRE OF HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE, 1920-1930

ORIGIN	<u>GENRE</u>				total
	musical comedy	revue	operetta	opera	
U.S.A.	20	13	19	44	106
FRANCE	3	0	2	0	5
BRITAIN	1	11	23	4	39
RUSSIA	0	3	0	2	5
CANADA	0	12	0	0	12
TOTAL	34	39	44	50	167

Source: Table III compiled by author following a systematic analysis of the entertainment pages of the Montreal Star and La Patrie, 1920-1930.

The second largest number of touring musical productions presented in Montreal came from France. Over the course of the 1920s, Montreal received a total of 99 French productions, representing about 27% of the city's entire musical repertoire. Table IV reveals that most of these productions were operettas and operas, and were staged at the Saint-Denis Theatre, the city's foremost playhouse for French-language productions. French musical attractions were also mounted at His Majesty's and the Princess Theatres as Tables II and III indicate.

TABLE IV
MUSICAL REPERTOIRE OF THE SAINT-DENIS THEATRE. 1920-1930

ORIGIN	GENRE				total
	musical comedy	revue	operetta	opera	
U.S.A.	0	0	0	24	24
FRANCE	0	0	61	19	80
BRITAIN	0	0	0	0	0
RUSSIA	0	0	0	22	22
CANADA	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	0	0	61	65	126

Source: Table IV compiled by author following a systematic analysis of the entertainment pages of La Patrie and La Presse. 1920-1930.

For their part, British musical productions accounted for 10.8% of Montreal's entire musical theatre repertoire. Table III indicates that all of these British productions, save for one, were performed at His Majesty's Theatre. Much of this English repertoire consisted of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas and musical revues from London's West End.

During the 1920s, Montreal was also visited by two Russian theatre companies. Both the Russian Grand Opera Company and Nikita Balietff's Chauve-Souris revue company toured the city repeatedly over the decade, and accounted for 7.6% of its entire lyric repertoire. Russian productions were mounted at all three of the city's lyric playhouses.

Although the Canadian musical revues staged by the Dumbells entertainment unit amounted to only 4.3% of Montreal's lyric repertoire, they constituted the second largest number of musical revues performed in the city. Between 1920 and 1930, the Dumbells company staged a total of 16 shows at His Majesty's and the Princess Theatres respectively.

As shown in Table V, the number of musical shows playing Montreal increased sharply in the second half of the decade. In fact, a total of 180 productions, or one half of the city's musical repertoire was presented in the last three theatre seasons of the decade. A number of factors were responsible for this intensification of musical activity.

The late 1920s were years of tremendous expansion on Broadway. During the peak 1927-1928 theatre season, a total of 264 productions were produced on Broadway, 51 of which were musicals.²⁸ It was no coincidence that the number of musical attractions presented in Montreal peaked in this period. The transformation of the Princess Theatre into a Shubert playhouse in March 1926, increased by 75 the number of musical productions touring Montreal over the decade. In addition to serving as a showcase for such celebrated stars as Al Jolson, Pat Rooney and Ann Pennington, the Princess was the playhouse chosen for the world premiere of Rudolf Friml's romantic operetta The White Eagle and a number of other pre-Broadway productions. Furthermore, in January 1927, the Saint-Denis Theatre resumed its role as a lyric playhouse, after serving exclusively as a motion picture cinema for the three previous consecutive seasons.

²⁸Gerald Bordman, The American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle (New York, Oxford University Press, 1978), p.433.

TABLE V
NUMBER OF MUSICAL PRODUCTIONS PER THEATRE SEASON

<u>PLAYHOUSE</u>				
SEASON	HIS MAJESTY'S	PRINCESS	SAINT-DENIS	TOTAL
1920-1921	20	0	9	29
1921-1922	10	0	8	18
1922-1923	25	0	37	62
1923-1924	3	0	0	3
1924-1925	13	0	0	13
1925-1926	11	5	0	16
1926-1927	11	20	16	47
1927-1928	24	17	22	63
1928-1929	21	33	32	86
1929-1930	29	0	2	31
TOTAL	167	75	126	368

Source: Table V compiled by author following a systematic analysis of the entertainment pages of the Montreal Star and La Patrie, 1920-1930.

Against this general overview of the musical stage of Montreal in the 1920s, the differences in genre stand out more sharply. Table VI indicates that Montreal's total lyric repertoire consisted of 131 operettas, 129 operas, 57 musical comedies, and 51 revues. Like Table V, it also reveals an intensification of musical activity in the second half of the decade. While the number of musical revues remained stable, a sharp increase in the number of musical comedies and operettas is noticeable at the end of the decade, especially in the 1927-1928 and 1928-1929 seasons.

TABLE VI
MONTREAL'S MUSICAL THEATRE REPERTOIRE BY GENRE

SEASON	MUSICAL COMEDY	REVUE	OPERETTA	OPERA	TOTAL
1920-1921	3	4	4	18	29
1921-1922	2	6	1	9	18
1922-1923	3	6	14	39	62
1923-1924	1	1	1	0	3
1924-1925	2	8	2	1	13
1925-1926	4	3	5	4	16
1926-1927	5	4	30	8	47
1927-1928	17	10	30	6	63
1928-1929	18	6	32	30	86
1929-1930	2	3	12	14	31
TOTAL	57	51	131	129	368

Source: Table VI compiled by author following a systematic analysis of the entertainment pages of the Montreal Star and La Patrie, 1920-1930.

While Table VI indicates that operetta constituted the largest proportion of musical productions presented in the city, Table VII illustrates that it was also the most frequently performed musical genre. Of the total number of 1799 musical theatre performances presented in Montreal between 1920 and 1930, 718 or 40% were operettas, 444 or 24.6% were musical revues, 417 or 23.1% were musical comedies, and 220 or 12.2% operas. In short, operetta surpassed revue, musical comedy, and opera in terms of the duration of their runs and actual number of performances. According to Table VII, musical revue surpassed musical comedy as the most frequently performed genre of musical theatre after operetta. Although second highest in terms of number of titles, opera was the least performed genre of musical theatre in postwar Montreal.

TABLE VII

TOTAL NUMBER OF MUSICAL THEATRE PERFORMANCES AT
HIS MAJESTY'S THE PRINCESS AND SAINT-DENIS THEATRES 1920-1930

ORIGIN	GENRE				total
	musical comedy	revue	operetta	opera	
U.S.A.	355	153	312	94	914
FRANCE	54	0	290	67	411
BRITAIN	8	100	116	24	248
RUSSIA	0	42	0	35	77
CANADA	0	149	0	0	149
	417	444	718	220	1,799

Source: Table VII compiled by author following a systematic analysis of the entertainment pages of the Montreal Star and La Patrie, 1920-1930.

Touring Operetta Companies

Throughout the 1920s, operetta constituted 35.5% of Montreal's total musical repertoire, and was the most frequently performed genre of musical theatre in Montreal. Unlike most opera companies, which gave only one or two performances of an item from their repertoire, most touring operettas played Montreal for one-week runs, or a total of eight performances of six evening presentations and two matinees. Of all the musical forms performed in Montreal in the 1920s, operetta appealed to the widest spectrum of society. These popular entertainments attracted Montrealers of all social classes, and, in particular, middle-and upper-class theatre patrons, who constituted the bulk of the city's theatre audiences. Jean Nolin, the drama critic for La Patrie explained the popularity of operetta in Quebec in the following terms:

L'Opérette représente l'une des formes les plus charmantes de l'esprit français...C'est pourquoi l'opérette a toujours été accueillie chez nous avec faveur. Les charmantes traditions de "La Mascotte," des "Cloches de

Corneville," de la Fille du Tambour-Major" et de tant d'autres, plus rapprochées ou plus lointaines, se déroulent agréablement sous nos yeux. Tout cela, plus que toute autre chose peut-être, nous rapproche du pays dont nous sommes nés.²⁹

A total of 68 or slightly more than one-half of the operettas presented in Montreal in the 1920s were French in origin. The vast majority of these productions were staged at the Saint-Denis Theatre. In fact, during the vibrant 1927-1928 theatre season, operetta was the only musical form presented at this playhouse.

Most French operetta companies were brought to Montreal by local impresarii. For example, the North American tour of La Troupe d'Opérette de Paris was organised by the Montreal opera impresario Albert Gauvin. The Parisian company opened at the Saint-Denis Theatre on January 9, 1927, following a successful six-week run at the Jolson Theatre on Broadway.³⁰ The company numbered 80 artists, including such well-known light-opera singers as Marcelle Evrard from the Gaiété-Lyrique Theatre in Paris, and the famous light tenor Georges Foix from the Opéra Comique.³¹ The touring company's artistic director, Thomas Salignac, was an experienced tenor and teacher from the Paris Conservatoire.³² Its musical conductor was Julien Clémendh of the Gaiété-Lyrique.³³

During its seven-week run in Montreal, the touring company presented 9 different French operettas, for a total of 54 performances. Among the most popular operettas

²⁹La Patrie, "L'Opérette Française," editorial comment, January 8, 1927, p.52.

³⁰La Patrie, "Une Véritable Sensation!" boxed advertisement, January 15, 1927, p.37.

³¹Montreal Star, "French Opéra Comique to Open at the Saint-Denis Theatre Sunday," article, January 6, 1927, p.8.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

performed by the Parisian troupe were Offenbach's Périchole and Les Cloches de Corneville. The company's tour of Montreal proved far more profitable than its six-week run on Broadway, where its audiences were limited to the French community of New York.³⁴

In the following theatre season of 1927-1928, the Saint-Denis Theatre presented the Compagnie Française d'Opérette, another touring operatic company from Paris, which came North after its New York run. Between November 20, 1927 and February 4, 1928, this travelling company presented 17 different operettas, almost all of French origin (see Appendix I). In addition to regular evening performances, the troupe played three matinees a week on Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday afternoons.

During Montreal's peak 1928-1929 theatre season, one half of the musical offerings at the Saint-Denis Theatre were French operettas. Over the course of this season, 12 different operettas were performed at the playhouse. The last four of these, La Cocarde de Mimi Pinson, Les Mousquetaires aux Couvent, Les Saltimbanques, and Dolly were all performed by La Troupe d'Opéra Comique, which was organised by the Quebec City impresario Charles Riou.³⁵ Its lyric artists were all auditioned and personally selected by Riou in Paris.³⁶ The touring company opened at the Saint-Denis Theatre on December 16, 1928, after a successful run in Quebec City. The company's entire repertoire consisted of

³⁴La Patrie, "M. Salignac et les tournées françaises," editorial comment, March 16, 1927, p.14; Alexander Mason, French Theatre in New York: A List of Plays 1899-1939, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1940), p.24.

³⁵La Patrie, "L'Opérette à Québec," article, July 14, 1928, p.36.

³⁶Ibid.

classical fare, except its final production Dolly, which featured fast-paced dance numbers and modern jazz melodies.³⁷

French operetta was not performed at the Saint-Denis Theatre only. Tables II and III reveal that both His Majesty's and the Princess Theatres also presented French attractions. During the last two theatre seasons of the decade, a number of Parisian operettas were presented at the city's two downtown English-language playhouses. The advance publicity for these productions in both the French and English-language press strongly suggests that these Parisian productions were attended by both francophone and anglophone theatregoers.

American operettas constituted the second-highest number of operettas, after those of France. Throughout the 1920s, a total of 40 American operettas toured Montreal, some returning for more than one season. For instance, the popular Shubert operetta Blossom Time, which ran for nearly two years on Broadway, toured Montreal for 8 different bookings over the course of the decade.³⁸ Another perennial favourite was Rose-Marie, one of the most popular operettas of the decade. Set in the Canadian Rockies in the postwar era, the operetta concerned the lovely Rose-Marie LaFlamme, a French-Canadian singer, whose lover Jim Kenyon, is falsely accused of murder.³⁹ The Royal Canadian Mounted Police ultimately solve the murder mystery, and the two lovers are reunited in time for the final curtain. Rudolf Friml's richly melodic score included the duet "Indian Love Call," sung by

³⁷La Presse, "Succès de "Dolly" au théâtre Saint-Denis," review, January 8, 1929, p.8.

³⁸Blossom Time was performed at His Majesty's Theatre during the weeks of October 16-21, 1922; February 5-10, 1923; October 27-November 1, 1924; March 10-15, 1930; and at the Princess Theatre in the weeks of March 22-27, 1926; November 8-13, 1926; March 19-24 1928; and February 18-23 1929. See Appendix I.

³⁹Gerald Bordman, The American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle, pp.391-392.

Rose-Marie and Jim; the rousing chorus number "The Mounties;" sung by the RCMP; and the romantic waltz "Door of My Dreams," performed by the symphony orchestra.⁴⁰

With its mélange of adventure, romance, and memorable melodies, Rose-Marie became one of the greatest musical successes of the 1920s. In addition to its 557 performances on Broadway, the operetta enjoyed 851 showings in London and an astonishing 1250 in Paris.⁴¹ It was one of the first musicals to attempt to integrate its music into the storyline.⁴² The popular operetta was performed in Montreal 64 times over the course of the 1920s. In 1926, a critic for the French-language musical publication La Lyre wrote:

Comme bien d'autres, nous nous confessons d'être retournés entendre et voir pour la quatrième fois "Rose Marie" dont le charme et la grâce ne vieillissent pas. C'est toujours le même enchantement.⁴³

The White Eagle, another Friml operetta, had its world première at the Princess Theatre on November 21, 1927. This production is worthy of close examination because it aroused great excitement in both the city's francophone and anglophone theatregoing milieus, and illustrates Montreal's special relationship with Broadway. Based on Edwin Milton Royle's successful play The Squaw Man, this large-scale production featured a cast of one hundred and fifty and an orchestra of twenty-five.⁴⁴ In attendance on opening night were composer Rudolf Friml, lyricists Brian Hooker and W.H. Post, producer Russell

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Gerald Bordman, American Operetta, p.114.

⁴²Gerald Bordman, The American Musical Theatre, pp.391-392.

⁴³La Lyre, "Rose Marie et Student Prince," October 1928, p.28.

⁴⁴Montreal Star, "The Squaw Man" Will Be Seen Here Shortly As A Musical Comedy."

Janney, and many other American theatrical and musical celebrities.⁴⁵ For these Broadway personalities Montreal was another American city.

The White Eagle opened to critical acclaim in Montreal. Samuel Morgan-Powell of the Montreal Star pronounced it "destined to fly high - and long": Friml's music he found particularly enjoyable, "a bigger achievement than the score of The Vagabond King."⁴⁶ The Montreal Gazette endorsed Morgan-Powell's verdict, describing the operetta as the major event of the season, its music approaching "the beauty and genius of grand opera."⁴⁷ The French-language press was equally enthusiastic. La Patrie, whose Jean Nolin described the production as "une série de tableaux mis en musique" destined for a lengthy international run, went so far as to publish a photograph of the operetta's complete original cast.⁴⁸ The Le Canada reviewer also praised the show's score, cast, and picturesque settings, and strongly urged his readers to go see the production.⁴⁹

article, November 5, 1927, p.25.

⁴⁵Montreal Star, "Prominent Theatrical Figures to Attend "The White Eagle," Première," article November 12, 1927, p.25.

⁴⁶Montreal Star, "Auspicious Opening of "The White Eagle" at Princess Theatre," November 22, 1927, p.6.

⁴⁷Montreal Gazette, "'The White Eagle' Opens Auspiciously," November 22, 1927, p.6.

⁴⁸La Patrie, "'The White Eagle" est une série de tableaux éblouissants et pittoresques," November 22, 1927, p.14.

⁴⁹Le Canada, "La grande première à Montréal au Princess obtient un succès superbe," November 22, 1927, p.5.

Despite its enthusiastic reception in Montreal, The White Eagle failed to excite the Broadway public, and closed there after only 48 performances.⁵⁰ The fierce competition on Broadway during the peak 1927-1928 theatre season was no doubt largely responsible for the failure. A quick glance at the show-pages of the New York Times in December 1927 reveals that dozens of new plays were competing for Christmas season openings.

FIGURE I

During the 1920s, Montreal audiences witnessed the premieres of several Broadway shows before they played New York.

PRINCESS TODAY 2.30-8.30
THE DUMB BELLS

NEXT WEEK MATINEES
WED. & SAT.

THE GREATEST MUSICAL EVENT OF THE SEASON
 FOR THE FIRST TIME ON ANY STAGE
RUSSELL JANNEY
 The Producer of "The Vagabond King"
 Presents
 A New Musical Romance of
 Aristocratic England and the Old West

THE WHITE EAGLE

Based on Edwin Milton Royle's Famous Play,
 "THE SQUAW MAN"
 Music by RUDOLF FRIML
 Composer of "The Vagabond King" and "Rose Marie"
 Staged by RICHARD BOLESLAVSKY
 Book and Lyrics by BRIAN HOOKER and W. H. POST.
 Music and Orchestra under the Direction of ANTON HEINDL.
 Scenes and Costumes by JAMES REYNOLDS.
 Dances Staged by RUSBY BARKLEY.

COMPANY OF 175.
 INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING DISTINGUISHED ARTISTS:
ALLAN PRIOR

ELSA PETERSEN	MARK SMITH
MARION KEELER	CHARLES GALLAGHER
LAWRENCE D'ORSAY	FORREST HUFF
ISABELLE O'MADIGAN	FRED TIDEN

AND THIRTY OTHER PRINCIPALS
 AND THE GREATEST SINGING CHORUS ASSEMBLED

Eves., 1.00 to 5.00. Wed. Mat 75c to \$2.00. Sat. Mat. 75c to \$1.50.

Source: Montreal Star, November 19, 1927, p.14

⁵⁰Burns Mantle, The Best Plays of 1927-1928. (New York, Dodd Mead, 1928), p.480.

On the evening of December 26, 1927, The White Eagle was but one of eleven new shows opening.⁵¹

In December 1929, Montreal theatregoers had the opportunity to see and hear Nina Rosa, another operetta tested in Montreal prior to its New York opening. Produced by the Shubert organisation, the operetta had been tried out in Philadelphia, Detroit and Cleveland before its one-week run at His Majesty's Theatre in Montreal.⁵² Set in modern Peru, the operetta revolves around the efforts of an American mining engineer to save a valuable mine for his Peruvian lover Nina Rosa.⁵³ In addition to a lively score by the successful Broadway composer Sigmund Romberg, the large-scale operetta featured some sophisticated dance sequences arranged by Busby Berkeley, who had also served as choreographer for Russell Janney's The White Eagle, and later won fame at Warner Brothers' Studios in Hollywood.⁵⁴

Like The White Eagle before it, Nina Rosa opened to favourable reviews in the Montreal press. The Montreal Star's Samuel Morgan-Powell wrote that the operetta "contained sufficient basic quality to ensure its success."⁵⁵ La Presse, Quebec's largest French-language daily newspaper agreed: "'Nina Rosa" est destinée à une brillante

⁵¹Gerald Bordman, The American Musical Theatre, p.433.

⁵²Montreal Herald, "'Nina Rosa" at His Majesty's For Coming Week." article, December 28, 1929, p.8.

⁵³Montreal Star, "'Nina Rosa" Has Much Charm and Colourful Appeal: Good Music," review, December 31, 1929, p.8.

⁵⁴La Presse, "Opérette nouvelle au His Majesty's," article, December 28, 1929, p.63.

⁵⁵Montreal Star, "'Nina Rosa" Has Much Charm and Colourful Appeal: Good Music," review, December 31, 1929, p.8.

carrière."⁵⁶ Montreal's enthusiastic predictions for Nina Rosa were proved correct. The operetta went on to enjoy a 137-performance run on Broadway.⁵⁷

In addition to French and American operetta, Montreal's musical repertoire also included some British operettas, especially those of Gilbert and Sullivan. In fact, with the sole exceptions of Percy Hutchison's sensational operetta The Maid of the Mountains, and an English version of Monsieur Beaucaire, the British operetta staged in postwar Montreal was entirely Gilbert and Sullivan. This classic English repertoire was performed by the world-renowned D'Oyly Carte Opera Company. Following a triumphant tour of Montreal and the Dominion during the winter of 1927, the London company returned in the 1928-1929 theatre season to pursue a transcontinental tour of North America. Both the 1927 and 1928-1929 tours of the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company began at His Majesty's Theatre, Montreal's leading venue for first-class British attractions. Altogether, the D'Oyly Carte Company played Montreal for 8 weeks, and gave a total of 69 performances. Of the nine different Gilbert and Sullivan operettas the company staged, The Mikado appears to have been the most popular, particularly among British-born Montrealers, who welcomed this cultural expression as a means to uphold their ethnic identity.⁵⁸

⁵⁶La Presse, "Nina Rosa est destinée à une brillante carrière," review, December 31, 1929, p.8.

⁵⁷Gerald Bordman, The American Musical Theatre, p.462.

⁵⁸Montreal Star, "D'Oyly Carte Company Achieves a Triumphant Return in the 'The Mikado,'" September 18, 1928, p.5; Pauline Greenhill, Ethnicity in the Mainstream: Three Studies of English Canadian Culture in Ontario (Montreal, McGill-Queen's Press, 1994), pp.126-151.

Touring Opera Companies

The largest touring opera company to visit Montreal in the 1920s was the San Carlo Opera Company. Established in New York City in 1913 by the Italian-American impresario Fortune Gallo, the San Carlo was the third largest touring American opera company, after the Metropolitan and Chicago companies.⁵⁹ Throughout the 1920s, the San Carlo Company toured the entire North American market extensively, including key points in Canada, Cuba, and Mexico.⁶⁰ This vast organisation numbered about 100 members, including 30 musicians, and a large cast of singers recruited from all over the world, including Canada.⁶¹ During its visit of Montreal in October 1921, the company's cast included the French Canadian soprano Sofia Charlebois and the Quebec-born baritone Joseph Roy.⁶² Occasionally, one or two local artists or musicians were invited to perform in Montreal with the opera company.⁶³ The San Carlo Company presented both standard and modern operatic fare. Most of these operas were performed in their original language, which was usually Italian.⁶⁴

During the 1920s, the San Carlo was the only grand opera company to tour Montreal regularly, with consistent financial success. The touring opera company appeared

⁵⁹Helmut Kallmann, Encyclopedia of Music in Canada, (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1992), p.842; Montreal Star, "San Carlo Opera At Princess Theatre For Weeks Open Aug. 30," article, August 7, 1926, p.18.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Helmut Kallmann, p.842.

⁶²La Patrie, "Les Artistes de la Troupe d'Opéra San Carlo," photospread, October 1, 1921, p.21.

⁶³Dorith Cooper, "Opera in Montreal and Toronto: A Study of Performance Traditions and Repertoire, 1783-1980," (Ph.D.Thesis, University of Toronto, 1983), p.534.

⁶⁴Dorith Cooper, p.535.

almost annually in Montreal, particularly in the early 1920s. Over the decade, it performed at all three of the city's playhouses. It appeared at His Majesty's in the 1920-1921 theatre season, at the Saint-Denis in the 1921-1922 season, and at the Princess during the 1926-1927 theatre season (see Appendix I). Altogether, the San Carlo Company presented a total of 32 performances in Montreal over the course of the decade.⁶⁵ The thousands of Montrealers who flocked to these productions suggest that opera was still a fairly popular form of musical entertainment in the 1920s.

European opera companies also played Montreal after the First World War. During the banner 1922-1923 opera season, the Russian Grand Opera Company was brought to the city by the Montreal impresario Albert Gauvin, following its successful run in New York. Founded in 1917, this touring opera company was composed of exiled Russian artists.⁶⁶ Its leading singers were former members of the Imperial Grand Opera of Petrograd and the Imperial Theatre in Moscow.⁶⁷ As ballet was an integral part of Russian opera, the company included a complete Ballet Russe division.⁶⁸ In addition to standard Italian and French repertoire, the opera company also sang standard Russian-language operas. During its two-week return engagement at the Saint-Denis Theatre in April 1923, the company

⁶⁵Montreal was also visited by smaller American opera companies, whose tours of the metropolis were very brief. In October 1920, for instance, the Scotti Grand Opera Company composed of artists from the Metropolitan Opera Company of New York performed in Montreal, but for only three days. Likewise, at the end of the decade, the American Music Drama Company presented four operatic performances at His Majesty's Theatre within three days. On Sunday, November 15, 1925, the de Feo Opera Company of New York appeared at His Majesty's Theatre for a single day's engagement. Unlike the San Carlo Company, these smaller touring companies sang most of their repertoire in English.

⁶⁶Transcontinental Tour - Russian Grand Opera Company, April 1923, Theatre Program, McCord Museum Archives.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid.

performed 11 different operas, six of which were of Russian origin. The company's opening-night performance of Rubinstein's The Demon was broadcast live to thousands of Quebecers by means of a special radio apparatus installed in the theatre by the Northern Electric Company.⁶⁹

Most of the French-language operas presented in Montreal were staged at the Saint-Denis Theatre at the end of the decade by L'Opéra Français de Montréal. Organised in France by Messieurs A.J. Brassard and Fernand de Potter, this touring company gave 49 performances of 10 different operas during its nine-week run at the Saint-Denis Theatre in the 1928-1929 theatre season.⁷⁰ Most of these were classic French-language operas such as Faust, Carmen, and Mireille.

Touring Musical Comedy Companies

During the 1920s, a total of 57 musical comedy productions were staged in Montreal. Of these, 44 or 77% were American, 12 were French, and 1 British. While 34 of these shows were presented at His Majesty's Theatre, 23 were mounted at the Princess playhouse. Not a single foreign musical comedy was performed at the Saint-Denis Theatre throughout the decade.

Table VIII reveals that a total of 37 different American musical comedies played Montreal over the course of the 1920s. Most of these productions were routed to the city as part of their post-Broadway tour of North America. According to Table VIII, some companies presented the same musical comedy in Montreal several times. For example, the

⁶⁹Montreal Gazette, "Thousands Heard Opera "Demon" Sung," article, April 10, 1923, p.9.

⁷⁰La Patrie, "L'Opéra Français," article, September 1, 1928, p.27.

hit musical comedy No. No. Nanette! was staged in the metropolis on four different occasions (1925, 1926, 1928, 1929), and attracted a large following at each return engagement.⁷¹ The plot of this production revolves around Nanette, a liberal flapper, who runs away to Atlantic City to join her frivolous friends. The show's catchy tunes, particularly "I want to be Happy" and "Tea for Two" became international hits, and American standards, for years afterwards.⁷² No. No. Nanette! remained Broadway's most popular musical comedy export until the end of the decade.⁷³

⁷¹Montreal Star, "'No. No. Nanette!' at His Majesty's Makes a Triumphant Return." review, April 20, 1926, p.6.

⁷²Gerald Bordman, American Musical Comedy, p.129.

⁷³Gerald Bordman, American Musical Theatre, pp.403-404.

TABLE VIII
AMERICAN MUSICAL COMEDIES
WITH DATES OF THEIR MONTREAL RUNS AND BROADWAY OPENINGS

PRODUCTION	MONTREAL RUN	BROADWAY OPENING
Take It From Me	Sept. 6-10, 1920	March 31, 1919
Linger Longer Letty	Dec. 27-Jan. 1 1920	Nov. 20, 1919
Irene	May 2-7, 1921	Nov. 18, 1919
"	Oct. 23-28, 1922	"
And Very Nice Too	May 8-13, 1922	Closed out-of-town
Marjolaine	Nov. 13-18, 1922	Jan. 24, 1922
Molly Darling	Apr. 23-27, 1923	Sept. 1, 1922
Gingham Girl	Dec. 3-8, 1923	Aug. 28, 1922
Little Jesse James	Feb. 2-7, 1925	Aug. 15, 1923
Sitting Pretty	Mar. 9-14, 1925	Apr. 8, 1924
No, No, Nanette!	Sept. 14-19, 1925	Sept. 16, 1925
"	Apr. 19-24, 1926	"
"	June 11-16, 1928	"
"	May 27-June 1, 1929	"
Daughter of Rosie O'Grady	May 8-13, 1922	Closed out-of-town
Tip Toes	Nov. 1-6, 1926	Dec. 28, 1925
"	Aug. 6-11, 1928	"
Kid Boots	Nov. 29-Dec. 4, 1926	Dec. 31, 1923
Big Boy	Jan. 31-Feb. 5, 1927	Jan. 7, 1925
Oh, Please!	May 30-June 4, 1927	Dec. 17, 1926
Happy	Nov. 28-Dec. 3, 1927	Dec. 5, 1927
Oh, Johnny	Dec. 12-17, 1927	Closed out-of-town
Oh, Kay!	Jan. 23-28, 1928	Nov. 8, 1926
Yours Truly	Apr. 16-21, 1928	Jan. 25, 1927
Hit the Deck	Apr. 23-28, 1928	Apr. 25, 1927
"	May 6-11, 1928	"
Wildflower	May 21-26, 1928	Feb. 7, 1923
Lady, Be Good!	May 28-June 2, 1928	Dec. 1, 1924
Good Morning Dearie	June 4-9, 1928	Nov. 1, 1921
Oh, Boy!	June 25-30, 1928	Feb. 20, 1917
Little Nellie Kelly	July 2-7, 1928	Nov. 13, 1922
Sally	July 9-14, 1928	Dec. 21, 1920
Queen High	July 16-21, 1928	Oct. 8, 1926
Very Good Eddie	July 23-28, 1928	Dec. 23, 1915
Up She Goes	July 30-Aug. 4, 1928	Nov. 6, 1922
Good News	Sept. 10-15, 1928	Oct. 6, 1927
Lovely Lady	Apr. 1-6, 1929	Dec. 29, 1927
Rain Or Shine	Apr. 15-20, 1929	Feb. 9, 1928
Sunny	Apr. 29-May 4 1929	Sept. 22, 1925
Rio Rita	May 6-11, 1929	Feb. 2, 1927
Five O'Clock Girl	May 13-18, 1929	Oct. 10, 1927
Mr. Battling Butter	May 20-25, 1929	Nov. 8, 1923

Source: Table VIII compiled by author following a systematic analysis of the entertainment pages of the Montreal Star and La Patrie, 1920-1930.

Table VIII illustrates that most touring American musical comedies played Montreal within two years of their initial Broadway debut. Some, such as Marjolaine, Molly Darling, and Oh, Please! were sent to Montreal within months of their New York openings. These recent theatrical creations enabled Montreal theatregoers to see and hear the latest musical talent Broadway had to offer. As a satellite of the New York stage, Montreal presented some of Broadway's newest and most popular musical comedy offerings.

Table VIII also indicates that four American musical comedies were sent to Montreal for brief tryout engagements. These musicals, which generated enormous excitement in Montreal, aptly illustrate the city's privileged theatrical relationship with New York. Out-of-town tryout tours enabled Broadway producers to test audience reaction and to fine-tune productions before their premières on Broadway.⁷⁴ The rewriting and addition of new numbers to a show playing out-of-town often increased its chances for success in New York.

Tryout centres geographically adjacent to New York City such as New Haven, Atlantic City, Boston, and Montreal were preferred. In Canada, Montreal was particularly favoured since its population closely resembled the New York public in taste, age, education, and financial resources. American producers also appreciated the discrimination of Montreal theatre audiences. As the city grew in size and sophistication in the 1920s so too did public demand for high-quality musical entertainment. As the Montreal theatre critic Jean Nolin put it a week before the November 1927 world première of The White Eagle:

⁷⁴Alfred Bernheim, The Business of Theatre: An Economic History of the American Theatre, 1750-1932, (New York, Benjamin Blom, 1932), p.151.

Le public de Montréal passe pour capricieux et difficile. Quand une troupe vient chez nous et qu'elle y réussit, le succès de la tournée est presque assuré ailleurs. C'est curieux, mais c'est ainsi.⁷⁵

According to Nolin, Montreal's reaction to tryout productions was often later duplicated by the New York public. A closer look at how the four musical comedies tested in Montreal fared on Broadway reveals that the city's reception was not always a good indicator of New York reaction.

Among the four musical comedy tryout productions sent to Montreal in the 1920s, only Happy made it successfully to Broadway. Presented in Montreal for preliminary one-week trial runs, And Very Nice, Too, The Daughter of Rosie O'Grady, and Oh, Johnny never were transferred to Broadway. All three musical comedies closed out-of-town, shortly after their tryout engagements in Montreal. While Montreal served as a springboard for some shows, it proved to be a cemetery for others.

The first Broadway-bound musical comedy staged in Montreal during the 1920s, premièred at His Majesty's Theatre on May 8, 1922. Named after the song hit of the show, And Very Nice, Too is a musical comedy about a jealous husband's attempts to organise an exclusively male social club, and the hilarious situations that arise as each club member ultimately succumbs to feminine charms.⁷⁶ Its notable cast was assembled by Merliock Productions of New York City, and headed by the Broadway singer Amelia Stone, the

⁷⁵La Patrie, "Deux manifestations qui font honneur au public montréalais," November 19, 1927, p.35.

⁷⁶Montreal Star, "Coming Attractions," article, May 6, 1922, p.24.

famous French dancer Marguerite Denys, and the popular tenor Walter Lawrence, who doubled as the production's stage director.⁷⁷

The opening night reception at His Majesty's Theatre was enthusiastic. The large first-night audience included a special contingent of 22 well-known Broadway theatre managers and stars.⁷⁸ On the morning after the première, the show received mostly favourable reviews. Its melodic score by Percy Wenrich, and elaborate dance arrangements by the celebrated Broadway choreographer David Bennett, were especially praised.⁷⁹ Only the production's libretto was criticised severely, and said to be in need of thorough revision.⁸⁰ In New York City, the Times for May 14th reported that "And Very Nice, Too had passed through a Montreal première with apparent success."⁸¹

Although And Very Nice, Too was advertised as the "big summer attraction at the Eltinge Theatre" in New York, the musical never reached Broadway.⁸² Despite its enthusiastic reception in Montreal the musical closed out-of-town, following a second one-week tryout run in Toronto. Nothing more was heard of the troubled production which had expected to open in New York in mid-May, following its brief trial runs in Canada.⁸³

⁷⁷Montreal Standard, "His Majesty's," article, May 6, 1922, p.4.

⁷⁸Montreal Star, "And Very Nice, Too," boxed advertisement, May 6, 1922, p.24; La Patrie, "La toute première d'une nouvelle comédie musical au Majesty's," article, May 6, 1922, p.22.

⁷⁹Montreal Star, "'And Very Nice, Too' An Entertainment of Refreshing quality," review, May 9, 1922, p.6; Montreal Gazette, "And Very Nice, Too," at His Majesty's. Is All of That," review, May 9, 1922, p.9.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹New York Times, May 14, 1922, section 7, p.x.

⁸²Montreal Star, "And Very Nice, Too," boxed advertisement, May 6, 1922, p.24.

⁸³The May 28, 1922 edition of the New York Times announced that "Three productions

The Daughter of Rosie O'Grady was the second Broadway-bound musical tested in Montreal in the 1920s. Like most American musical comedies of the period, Rosie O'Grady was first and foremost a fast-paced dancing show. Its large cast was headed by the great vaudeville tap dancer Pat Rooney, his equally talented wife Marion Bent, and their seventeen year old son Pat Rooney, III.⁸⁴ The plot of the musical revolves around Pat Rooney, who after leaving Ireland to make his fortune in America, wins the hand of Rosie O'Grady.⁸⁵ The show's score by the veteran Broadway writer and performer Joseph Stantley included the catchy songs "Irish Moon," "Homeward Bound" and "Rosie O'Grady's A Charleston Lady."⁸⁶

The highlight of the production was the first act finale in which the entire cast joined in the dancing of the popular Charleston, which was then sweeping the continent. In a curtain speech at the end of the show, Rooney expressed his deep appreciation to his Montreal fans for welcoming him back to the city so enthusiastically.⁸⁷ Despite Rooney's personal popularity, The Daughter of Rosie O'Grady also closed out-of-town before reaching Broadway.

intended for New York have suddenly closed out-of-town." "And Very Nice, Too" was likely one of these three shows as the author has found no further trace of the musical in the New York press.

⁸⁴Montreal Star, "Pat Rooney Third is Determined to be an Actor of Classic Roles," article, April 10, 1926, p.22; Montreal Standard, "The Daughter of Rosie O'Grady" Opens at Princess Monday," article, April 17, 1926, p.40.

⁸⁵Montreal Gazette, "Pat Rooney Shows Big-Time Skill in Irish Offering," review, April 20, 1926, p.13; La Presse, "Princess," review, April 20, 1926, p.8.

⁸⁶Montreal Star, "Pat Rooney Third is Determined to be an Actor of Classic Roles," article, April 10, 1926, p.22.

⁸⁷Montreal Star, "The Rooneys in Fast Dancing Show at the Princess are Welcome," review, April 20, 1926, p.6.

Unlike And Very Nice, Too and The Daughter of Rosie O'Grady, which both closed out-of-town, the tryout of Happy successfully made it to Broadway. The musical comedy attracted full houses at His Majesty's Theatre, and highly favourable reviews from the Montreal critics. Samuel Morgan-Powell described the production as "one of the snappiest musical comedies seen here for a long time," while the Montreal Gazette reviewer found Montreal "delighted to act as official taster when such fresh and dainty fare as "Happy" was provided."⁸⁸ The city's francophone critics also had nothing but praise for the show. Happy, La Patrie's Jean Nolin insisted, "mérite d'attirer tous ceux qui goûtent les bonnes comédies musicales bien présentées par d'agréables interprètes."⁸⁹

Following its tryout engagement in Montreal, Happy opened at the Earl Carroll Theatre on December 5, 1927, and ran for a modest 82 performances.⁹⁰ Despite its agreeable score, Happy was no competition for Florenz Ziegfeld's Show Boat and the other elaborate musicals of the peak 1927-1928 Broadway season. For its composer Frank Grey, this was his third and final attempt to achieve success on Broadway.⁹¹ Grey's two previous Broadway shows Sue Dear (1922) and The Matinee Girl (1926) also failed to achieve

⁸⁸Montreal Star, "'Happy,' New Musical Comedy, Scores Hit on its Obvious Merits," November 29, 1927, p.8; Montreal Gazette, "Cordial Reception Given to "Happy,"" November 29, 1927, p.10.

⁸⁹La Patrie, "'Happy,' comédie musicale en trois actes," November 29, 1927, p.14

⁹⁰Ken Bloom, American Song: The Complete Musical Theatre Companion, Volume I, (New York, Facts on File Publications, 1985), p.153. At this time, most shows on Broadway ran for fewer than 100 performances, and generally lost money. "Hits" were defined as productions which had over 150 performances, while those under 50 performances were considered "flops." With its 82-perfor-mance run, Happy was an "in-between show" and made very little, if any profits for its producers. See Jack Poggi, Theatre in America: The Impact of Economic Forces 1870-1967, (New York, Cornell University Press, 1968), pp.74-76; Morton Eutis, Broadway Inc.: The Theatre As a Business, (New York, Benjamin Blom, 1971), pp.3-9, 20.

⁹¹Gerald Bordman, The American Musical Theatre, p.433.

profitable runs."⁹² Oh, Johnny!, the fourth American musical comedy tryout in postwar Montreal was produced by the New York theatrical partnership of Louis Isquith and Joseph Klein. Unlike its predecessors it opened at the Princess Theatre on December 12, 1927 to lukewarm reviews. The Montreal Star's Samuel Morgan-Powell noted that despite its "uncommonly smooth first-night performance," the show "seemed to sag somewhat -when the level of comedy does not appear to be maintained."⁹³ Without a quickened pace, Morgan-Powell warned, "its chance is not a very bright one." The Montreal Herald critic found Oh, Johnny! to be "amiable entertainment," and described its score as "a succession of tuneful arias, none of them especially distinguished, perhaps, but most suitable for humming in your bath."⁹⁴ Writing in La Patrie, Jean Nolin characterised Oh, Johnny! as a "comédie musicale de deuxième zone" designed merely to please the ear and eye.⁹⁵ Like Samuel Morgan-Powell, Nolin called attention to the show's need for compression, particularly in the first act. The review in La Presse was generally more favourable, and described the production as "légère et jolie."⁹⁶

Like And Very Nice, Too and The Daughter of Rosie O'Grady, Oh, Johnny! closed out-of-town before reaching Broadway. Aware of the highly competitive situation in Manhattan during the peak 1927-1928 season, the producers of Oh, Johnny! toured the

⁹²Ibid., Ken Bloom, American Song, pp.456, 708-709.

⁹³Montreal Star, "'Oh, Johnny!' Has its Première at Princess Popular Farce Basis." December 13, 1927, p.8.

⁹⁴Montreal Herald, "'Oh, Johnny!' Proves Satisfying Comedy at Princess Theatre." review, December 13, 1927, p.2.

⁹⁵La Patrie, "Première de 'Oh, Johnny!.'" review, December 13, 1927, p.6.

⁹⁶La Presse, December 13, 1927, p.8.

production through upper New York State before finally braving the ordeal of a Broadway opening.⁹⁷ Although it eventually reached New York City, and ran briefly at the Bronx Opera House and Teller's Shubert Theatre in Brooklyn, the show closed before its scheduled Broadway opening, and was never heard of again.⁹⁸ With the exception of a few troubled shows, then, Montreal generally avoided the disasters of Broadway. The vast majority of its American musical attractions in the 1920s were road-tested hits, direct from highly successful Broadway runs.

One of the most popular American musical comedies to visit Montreal in this decade was Big Boy, which ran in early 1927, two years after its Broadway opening. Produced by the Shuberts as a vehicle for the sensational blackface comedian Al Jolson, Big Boy was one of the most elaborate productions ever sent on tour, and travelled in a special ten-car train.⁹⁹ The hit show opened at the Princess for one week on January 31, 1927. In Big Boy, Jolson played a black jockey named Gus, whose star horse "Big Boy" wins the Kentucky Derby.¹⁰⁰ As on Broadway, the scene that stopped the show in Montreal was Jolson racing to the finish line on a real thoroughbred, galloping ahead of three others on a hidden treadmill.¹⁰¹ At the end of the opening night show, Jolson appeared solo, dropped

⁹⁷New York Times, December 25, 1927, section 8, p.x.

⁹⁸New York Times, "Oh, Johnny!" boxed advertisements, January 15, 1928, p.x:3; January 18, 1928, p.23.

⁹⁹Montreal Star, "Al Jolson Will Have New Repertoire When He Comes to Princess," article, January 22, 1927, p.20.

¹⁰⁰Gerald Bordman, American Musical Theatre, p.398.

¹⁰¹Michael Freeland, Jolson, (New York, Stein & Day, 1972), p.90; Montreal Star, "Al Jolson Holds His Old-Time Power Over Enthusiastic Audience," review, February 1, 1927, p.6; Montreal Star, "Preparing Stage of the Princess Theatre for a Great Race in "Big Boy," January 8, 1927, p.18; La Patrie, "Al Jolson une excitante course de chevaux," review, February 1, 1927, p.14.

his performance in the role of the jockey, and accepted requests to sing hit songs from his previous productions.¹⁰² The packed house listened and applauded the Broadway star until nearly midnight.¹⁰³

Jolson dazzled Montreal as easily as he did Broadway. Billed as the "world's greatest entertainer," Jolson was at the peak of his show business career when he toured the city. On the day after Big Boy's Montreal opening, local critics had nothing but praise for the musical comedy and its leading star. La Presse, the city's largest French-language daily, hailed the show as "l'un des plus beaux et des plus féeriques spectacles de la saison à Montréal," and Jolson as "un artiste comédien consommé."¹⁰⁴ Jean Nolin of La Patrie reported that "plusieurs de ceux qui étaient dans la salle avaient déjà entendu Jolson et l'accueillèrent comme une vieille connaissance que l'on est heureux de recevoir."¹⁰⁵ Montreal's English-language press was just as enthusiastic in its fulsome eulogies of Jolson. Samuel Morgan-Powell of the Montreal Star proclaimed favourably that "Jolson is himself "Big Boy." His welcome was commensurate with his skill - remarkable and beyond challenge."¹⁰⁶ For its part, the Montreal Gazette endorsed Powell's verdict:

Of all the comedy performers on the stage of the North American continent, none gives himself so unreservedly and so generously as does Jolson to the task of satisfying his auditors and infecting them with his own electrifying

¹⁰²Montreal Star, "Al Jolson Holds His Old-Time Power Over Enthusiastic Audience," review, February 1, 1927, p.6; Montreal Gazette, "Comedian Has Lost None of His Unique Quality As Entertainer," review, February 1, 1927, p.11.

¹⁰³Ibid.

¹⁰⁴La Presse, "Al Jolson dans "Big Boy" au Princess," review, February 1, 1927, p.14.

¹⁰⁵La Patrie, "Al Jolson une excitante course de chevaux," review, February 1, 1927, p.14.

¹⁰⁶Montreal Star, "Al Jolson Holds His Old-Time Power Over Enthusiastic Audience," review, February 1, 1927, p.6.

energy, spontaneity and wholehearted interest in what he is saying, doing or singing.¹⁰⁷

The rave reviews which Al Jolson received in both the city's French- and English-language press clearly illustrate how the popularity of American entertainers in Montreal crossed linguistic and cultural lines. In short, Jolson's appeal was not limited to one segment of Montreal society. As on Broadway, Jolson left all his Montreal spectators spellbound, regardless of their social background or ethnic origin.

Oh, Please! was another American musical comedy whose Canadian-born star, Beatrice Lillie, also generated great excitement in Montreal. The production toured Montreal in June 1927, after a successful run in New York City, Chicago, and Toronto.¹⁰⁸ In his review of the show, La Patrie's Jean Nolin expressed nothing but praise for Lillie, whom he described as possessing "un talent véritable de comédienne."¹⁰⁹ "Si le rire n'existait pas," Nolin insisted, "Mlle. Lillie l'inventerait." In addition to his highly favourable review, Nolin published a photograph of, and private interview with, the celebrity.¹¹⁰

Beatrice Lillie also received extensive coverage in the English-language press. The Montreal Star's Samuel Morgan-Powell praised the show, and described its star Beatrice

¹⁰⁷Montreal Gazette, "Comedian Has Lost None of His Unique Quality as Entertainer," review, February 1, 1927, p.11

¹⁰⁸Montreal Gazette, boxed advertisement, May 28, 1927, p.10.

¹⁰⁹La Patrie, "Beatrice Lillie," May 31, 1927, p.14.

¹¹⁰La Patrie, photospread - "Béatrice Lillie la populaire artiste canadienne, au His Majesty's;" La Patrie, "Béatrice Lillie," interview, June 1, 1927, p.14.

Lillie as "an artist to her fingertips."¹¹¹ Like La Patrie, the Montreal Star published a private interview with the celebrity, in which she revealed some regret at her poor reception in her native Toronto. "They are always crying for good comedy there," Lillie lamented, "but when they do get it, they fail to go - I don't think I shall ever go back there again."¹¹² Despite her disenchantment with the Queen City, Lillie returned to Toronto and Montreal in May 1929 as the leading star of Noel Coward's musical revue This Year of Grace.

Of the 44 American musical comedies presented in Montreal in the 1920s, twelve were performed by the Savoy Musical Comedy Company, an American repertory company established in 1928. The company's founder and sponsor, Charles Emerson Cook, was a Harvard graduate with wide theatrical experience. In addition to working closely for sixteen years with the celebrated New York playwright and producer David Belasco, Cook served as the general manager of the highly successful musical comedy production No, No, Nanette, which earned revenue of more than 3.5 million dollars.¹¹³ For twelve weeks during the summer of 1928, Cook's repertory company enlivened the normally vacant stage of His Majesty's Theatre.

Each of the Savoy Musical Comedy Company's principal players was a well-known celebrity of Broadway and the London stage. Among these were Edward Nell, who had appeared previously in Montreal in the role of The Vagabond King, Virginia Marvin, who had sung the title roles of La Poupée and Véronique at the Opéra-Comique in Paris; and

¹¹¹ Montreal Star, "Beatrice Lillie in "Oh, Please" Reveals Unique Individuality," review, May 31, 1927, p.6.

¹¹² Montreal Star, "Beatrice Lillie On Comedy and Methods of Assuring Success" - interview," June 1, 1927, p.6.

¹¹³ La Presse, "Longue saison de comédie musicale" article, April 28, 1928, p.69.

Donald Brian, the Montreal-born musical comedy artist and popular matinee idol.¹¹⁴ The repertory company also featured "a beauty chorus" selected from the chorus-lines of such distinguished musical revues as the Ziegfeld Follies, Artists and Models and George White's Scandals.¹¹⁵ The Broadway composer and conductor Ben Jerome served as the company's musical director.¹¹⁶

During its three-month summer season, the Savoy Musical Comedy Company presented 12 different American musical comedies, beginning with Wildflower on May 21, 1928. This opening attraction was followed by such hits as Little Nellie Kelly, Sally, Queen High, and Up She Goes, all of which had never before been staged in Montreal, despite their successful runs on Broadway and solid international reputations.¹¹⁷ In short, the Savoy Musical Comedy Company presented the newest and most popular Broadway hits of the decade.

In addition to successful American shows, Montreal also received several French musical comedy productions. The Modern French Musical Comedy Company was brought to North America for the first time by the Canadian impresario J.A. Gauvin in early 1929. The Parisian repertory company toured Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto before a one-month run at the Jolson Theatre in New York City.¹¹⁸ Installed at the Princess Theatre, its popular

¹¹⁴Montreal Star, "A Musical Comedy Season," editorial comment, May 19, 1928, p.24.

¹¹⁵Montreal Star, "Miss Perqueta Courtney Will Be Comedienne of Musical Stock Company," article, April 14, 1928, p.27.

¹¹⁶Montreal Star, "Subscription Sale of Seats for the Musical Comedy Stock," article, April 28, 1928, p.19.

¹¹⁷Ibid.

¹¹⁸Montreal Star, "French Musical Comedy Season to Open on January 14 at the Princess," article, December 29, 1928, p.15; Alexander Mason, French Theatre in New

musical comedy repertoire included the highly successful Trois Jeunes Filles aux Folies Bergère, which enjoyed a spectacular run of over 2,000 performances in Paris, and the equally popular Ta Bouche.¹¹⁹

The repertory company numbered twenty artists and included the leading French comedian Christian Servatius, the popular Parisian tenor Georges Foix, and the multi-talented Sonia Alny, all of whom had toured Montreal two years previously with La Troupe d'Opérette de Paris.¹²⁰ In an interview with the English-language Montreal Star, Sonia Alny revealed the enormous challenges faced by the modern musical comedy star: "One must be a comedienne, a dancer, and a singer all at the same time. I took dancing lessons all last year to qualify myself for this tour."¹²¹ The company's musical director Julien Clémandh, had also toured Montreal previously, as the conductor of the Troupe d'Opérette de Paris.

The run of the French musical comedy Mozart at the Princess Theatre in February 1927 also generated enormous enthusiasm in Montreal. The musical, which was presented in New York City and Boston before its Montreal opening, starred its author and librettist Sacha Guitry and his celebrated wife Yvonne Printemps.¹²² In a short curtain speech before the opening night performance in Montreal, Guitry exclaimed:

York: A List of Plays 1899-1939, pp.364-366.

¹¹⁹Montreal Star, "French Light Opera At Princess Theatre Opens Early in Coming Month," December 22, 1928, p.26.

¹²⁰Montreal Star, "French Musical Comedy Company From Paris at Princess on January 14," article, January 5, 1929, p. 20; January 12, 1929, p.16.

¹²¹Montreal Star, "Sonia Alny Confesses to District Prejudice For the Musical Drama," interview, February 2, 1929, p.14.

¹²²Montreal Star, "Sacha Guitry Talks of Genius and Work," February 7, 1926, p.6

J'espère que vous aimerez Mozart. Ce n'est pas de l'histoire, c'est une histoire. Le caractère de Mozart m'a toujours grandement intéressé et j'ai toujours pensé que Mozart était un homme et non une ange.¹²³

Guitry also expressed his delight to be performing with his wife before a British audience.¹²⁴

Mozart was attended by hundreds of Montrealers, both French and English-speaking. Among its English-speaking spectators were regular theatregoers and students from the Société Française of McGill University.¹²⁵ The musical received favourable reviews from the Montreal press, which took great interest in its creative talent. Samuel Morgan-Powell reserved his strongest praise for Printemps, who he pronounced "IS Mozart." "She is alluring and she is compelling, and visualises for us the whole soul of an age we had forgotten."¹²⁶ The reviewer for La Lyre, a local French-language musical monthly publication confessed to attending the show three times. "Rarement et même jamais," he insisted. "Montréal n'a eut l'avantage d'entendre une oeuvre aussi pleinement rendue."¹²⁷ La Patrie's Jean Nolin also applauded Mozart, noting that each act was followed by an ovation for Guitry and Printemps.¹²⁸

During their brief tour of Montreal, Guitry and Printemps received invitations from all corners of the city, including McGill University. On the afternoon of February 7, just hours before the opening night performance of Mozart, Guitry addressed a large audience at

¹²³La Lyre, "Le mois théâtral," February 1927, p.24.

¹²⁴Montreal Star, "Yvonne Printemps and Sacha Guitry Score a Triumph in Mozart," February 8, 1927, p.6.

¹²⁵McGill Daily, February 7, 1927, p.1.

¹²⁶Montreal Star, "Yvonne Printemps and Sacha Guitry Score Triumph in Mozart," review, February 8, 1927, p.6.

¹²⁷La Lyre, "Le Mois Théâtral," February, 1927, p.24.

¹²⁸La Patrie, February 8, 1927, p.14.

Moyse Hall.¹²⁹ Guitry remarked how pleasantly surprised he was to find how predominant the French language was in Montreal. His address was followed by a short reception sponsored by the University's Department of Romance Languages.¹³⁰ On the following day, Guitry and Printemps were hosted at City Hall by Mayor Médéric Martin, and other city officials.¹³¹ The two Parisian stars were also later fêted at the Club St. Denis, a popular downtown nightspot among middle-class francophones.¹³²

Touring Revue Companies

The fourth form of musical theatre available to Montreal theatregoers in the 1920s was musical revue. Musical revues constituted the most lavish productions ever staged in the city. Most came to Montreal with their original casts intact.

Over the decade, a total of 51 musical revues were presented to Montreal audiences. Thirty-nine were staged at His Majesty's Theatre, while the remaining 12 were performed at the Princess Theatre. Of the 51 revues, 19 or 37% were American, 16 Canadian, 12 British, and 4 Russian. As with the city's operatic and musical comedy offerings, most musical revues from the United States played Montreal in the second half of the 1920s. The number of American musical revues touring the city peaked during the 1927-1928 theatre season. A quick glance at this season's offerings reveals that six different American revues were staged in the city.

¹²⁹McGill Daily, "M. Sacha Guitry at McGill," February 8, 1927, p.1.

¹³⁰Ibid.

¹³¹La Patrie, "Le maire reçoit Sacha Guitry et Yvonne Printemps," February 9, 1927, p.1.

¹³²La Lyre, "Le Mois Théâtral," February, 1927, p.24.

Montreal's 1927-1928 theatre season began promisingly on August 29th with the sensational musical revue Mamie Smith and Her Gang. Advertised as the "fastest dancing, all-coloured show on tour," this all-black revue featured Mamie Smith, the world-famous star of Victor Records, a twenty-five member cast, and a large jazz orchestra.¹³³ This dazzling production was followed by the equally spectacular revue Allez-Oop, direct from its fifteen-week run at the Earl Carroll Theatre on Broadway.¹³⁴

During the peak 1927-1928 theatre season, Montreal was also host to a number of serial musical revues. Gay Paree, the first of these, was an elaborate Broadway production featuring forty different scenes and its original New York company. Heading its huge cast of one hundred and fifty was the celebrated vaudeville comedian Charles "Chic" Sale, who had also starred in the previous 1925 edition of the annual Shubert revue.¹³⁵

Equally spectacular was the twentieth annual edition of the world-renowned Ziegfeld Follies, which opened for a week's engagement at His Majesty's Theatre on April 2, 1928. This large-scale production featured the original Broadway cast, and had as its feature attraction the famous Denishawn Dancers, with Ziegfeld stars Ruth St. Denis and her husband Ted Shawn at their head.¹³⁶ The show's colourful spectacle, and numerous dance numbers proved especially popular with Montreal audiences.¹³⁷

¹³³Montreal Standard, "Mamie Smith and Her Own Show" Gala Attraction, Opening Princess," August 20, 1927, p.40: see also boxed advertisement.

¹³⁴Gerald Bordman, American Musical Theatre, p.426.

¹³⁵Montreal Star, "'Gay Paree' Coming to the Princess Features Chic Sale Comedian," March 31, 1928, p.22.

¹³⁶Montreal Star, March 31, 1928, p.14.

¹³⁷Montreal Star, "'Ziegfeld Follies At His Majesty's Features Denishawn Dancers," April 3, 1928, p.6.

The Follies were followed into Montreal by the seventh annual edition of the George White Scandals, with the cast that had premiered at the Apollo Theatre in New York in 1926. Direct from their successful one-year New York run, the company included Broadway stars Ann Pennington and Willie Howard, backed by a troupe of seventy-five precision chorus girls.¹³⁸ This sensational Broadway show drew thousands of playgoers to the Princess Theatre, particularly at its opening night performance, which was completely sold out.¹³⁹

The Earl Carroll Vanities was the final Broadway revue of Montreal's 1927-1928 theatre season. Although less dazzling than the other major revues, the Earl Carroll Vanities also regaled Montreal audiences with its comedy, tuneful songs, and a long line of scantily-clad young women, the most important feature of any successful revue of the period.

From this brief glance at the American revue offerings of the 1927-1928 theatre season, it is clearly evident that Montreal received some of the top musical revues on Broadway. Mamie Smith and Her Gang, the first revue of the 1927-1928 season, was not the only black show that played Montreal in the 1920s. In September 1924, His Majesty's Theatre had presented Shuffle Along, the most successful African-American revue on the road. The road company sent to Montreal comprised a seventy-five member cast and a large jazz orchestra.¹⁴⁰ The show's score included the popular fast-paced foxtrot "I'm Just

¹³⁸Montreal Star, March 31, 1928, p.14.

¹³⁹Montreal Herald, "'George White's Scandals' Takes Audience by Storm," review, May 3, 1928, p.5.

¹⁴⁰Montreal Star, "'Shuffle Along' at His Majesty's Full of Comedy and Peppy Jazz," review, September 16, 1924, p.6.

Wild About Harry" and many other catchy jazz and ragtime numbers.¹⁴¹ On the occasion of its second visit to Montreal in November 1926, Shuffle Along received strong reviews in the local press, particularly from Samuel Morgan-Powell of the Montreal Star. "If these coloured entertainers know any one thing well, Morgan-Powell wrote, "it is how to dance. They literally live the intricate and unexpected rhythms of jazz music."¹⁴²

In the Spring of 1929, Montreal received another African-American musical revue. Lew Leslie's sensational Blackbirds revue opened at His Majesty's Theatre for one week on May 13, 1929. As this hit show was still one of the biggest attractions on Broadway, Montreal received the road company production direct from its lengthy tour of Boston, Philadelphia, London and Paris.¹⁴³ Like Shuffle Along before it, Blackbirds aroused enormous interest and excitement in Montreal, and took the city by storm. According to Samuel Morgan-Powell, the large first-night audience "loved it."¹⁴⁴

Much like Shuffle Along, the score of Blackbirds was dominated by jazz music. The show's composer Jimmy McHugh, was the leading songwriter at Harlem's famous Cotton Club.¹⁴⁵ Although a number of American musical comedies performed previously in Montreal featured some jazz tunes within their scores, Shuffle Along and Blackbirds were based entirely on jazz music. These African-American musical revues introduced jazz

¹⁴¹Gerald Bordman, American Musical Theatre, pp.359-360

¹⁴²Montreal Star, "'Shuffle Along' Goes With Snap and Vim at His Majesty's Theatre," review, November 16, 1926, p.2.

¹⁴³Montreal Herald, "Lustrous Revue "Blackbirds" at His Majesty's," article, May 4, 1929, p.13.

¹⁴⁴Montreal Star, "'Blackbirds" Revue is Syncopation Incarnate and Feathered Febrility," May 14, 1929, p.8.

¹⁴⁵Edward Jablonski, The Encyclopedia of American Music, (New York, Doubleday & Co., 1981), p.261.

to many white middle-class Montrealers, who might otherwise have missed exposure to this new American art form.

American jazz had evolved from African-American folk music and ragtime in the South in the early twentieth century. Between 1910 and 1920, jazz spread into the North East and encountered its Golden Age in the postwar years.¹⁴⁶ From the start, jazz represented modernity, and a revolt against conventional forms of lyric art. Its unusual use of improvisation and fast-paced rhythm was clearly reflective of the intense socio-economic changes underway in North America during the 1920s. In short, jazz was a musical expression of the spirit of the times.

Although jazz was popular among intellectuals in the show-business world, and with young people, it was not welcomed by the public at large. While jazz music generally appealed to younger Montrealers, it alienated older and more genteel listeners accustomed to more traditional musical forms such as operetta. The older generation saw the jazz craze and modern dancing as a dangerous sign of decadence. In 1922, the Montreal Herald denounced the new American art form and predicted its downfall.¹⁴⁷

While the vast majority of American revues came to Montreal following successful Broadway runs, the Shubert musical revue Gay Paree opened at the Princess Theatre on April 22, 1929 before its intended Broadway opening. This pre-Broadway production came to Montreal direct from tryout engagements in Chicago, Buffalo, Pittsburgh and

¹⁴⁶James Collier, Duke Ellington, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1987), pp.71-75; Louis Armstrong: An American Genius, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1983), pp.89, 120-124.

¹⁴⁷John Gilmore, Swinging in Paradise: The Story of Jazz in Montreal (Montreal, Vehicule Press, 1988), pp.35-36.

Rochester.¹⁴⁸ The lavish revue was the most ambitious of a long line of Winter Garden shows, and required a special train of eleven baggage cars and Pullmans to meet its touring engagements.¹⁴⁹ Like its 1925 and 1926 predecessors, this third edition of Gay Paree was an elaborate spectacle presented in thirty-four different colourful scenes. At the head of its huge cast of 163 was the celebrated vaudeville comedian Charles "Chic" Sale, who had also starred in the two previous editions of the annual Shubert revue.¹⁵⁰ As with all other American revue companies, Gay Paree included a beautiful dancing chorus, which had as its main feature, the lovely Montreal-born show-girl "La Pulchra."¹⁵¹

Despite a number of sympathetic reviews in the local press, the show closed out-of-town shortly after its brief Montreal run, and was never revived. Within weeks of the show's closing, the Shuberts had produced a new musical revue entitled Broadway Nights.¹⁵² The failure of Gay Paree was not financially devastating to the multimillion dollar Shubert Empire.

The Canadian Dumbells entertainment unit performed the second largest number of musical revues in Montreal during the 1920s. Named after the Dumbell insignia of the Canadian 3rd Division, the Dumbells were a Canadian Army group of performers

¹⁴⁸Montreal Herald, "'Gay Paree' Only Revue of Season," article, April 13, 1929, p.11; Montreal Star, "Forthcoming Events," article, April 13, 1929, p.28.

¹⁴⁹Princess Theatre Programme #29, April 8, 1929, Eric McClean Programme Collection, Music Division, National Library of Canada.

¹⁵⁰Montreal Herald, "'Gay Paree' Only Revue of Season," article, April 13, 1929, p.11; Montreal Star, "Gay Paree," boxed advertisement, April 13, 1929, p.28.

¹⁵¹Montreal Star, "'Gay Paree' Presented at Princess Theatre to a Crowded Auditorium," review, April 23, 1929, p.6.

¹⁵²New York Times, July 16, 1929, p.23

established by Captain Merton Plunkett to entertain front-line soldiers during the First World War.¹⁵³

After the war, the Dumbells returned to Canada and re-organised in Orillia, Ontario. Its membership included Captain Merton Plunkett, its managing director and comedian, Ted Charters, assistant manager and comedian, the popular female impersonators Al Plunkett and Ross Hamilton, the comic singer Albert "Red" Newman, the pianist and musical director Jack Ayre, the tenor Bill Tennent, the bass baritone Bert Langley, and the actors Brayford and Leonard Young.¹⁵⁴

The company's first musical revue Biff, Bing, Bang opened at the Grand opera House in London, Ontario on October 1, 1919, and then went on to success in Toronto, Montreal and New York.¹⁵⁵ On 9, May 1921, Biff, Bing, Bang opened at the Ambassador Theatre on Broadway, and enjoyed a four-month run.¹⁵⁶ Biff, Bing, Bang was the first all-Canadian revue to play Broadway. The two-act revue received favourable reviews from the New York critics. The New York Times particularly commended Red Newman's wartime song "It's a Lovely War" which it described as "one of the high spots of the evening."¹⁵⁷ From Broadway the revue went on to Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland and Boston.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵³Max Braithwaite, "The Rise and Fall of the Dumbells," Macleans Magazine, January 1, 1952.

¹⁵⁴Helmut Kallmann, Encyclopedia of Music in Canada, p.286.

¹⁵⁵Ibid.

¹⁵⁶Ibid.

¹⁵⁷New York Times, "Biff, Bing, Bang Has Dash," review, May 10, 1921, p.20.

¹⁵⁸Al Plunkett, Al Plunkett: The Famous Dumbell, New York City, Pageant Press, 1956), p.77.

Many shows followed Biff, Bing, Bang to Montreal. Between 1920 and 1930 a total of 16 Dumbell revues were staged in the city. Among these were Camouflage, the Dumbell's Revue of 1922, Carry On, Full of Pep, Ace High, Oh, Yes!, Lucky Seven, Three Bags Full, Joy Bombs, Oo-La-La, Bubbling Over, and Why Worry?. Camouflage, the first of these revues, ran at His Majesty's Theatre for three weeks, or a total of 25 performances (see Appendix I).

The Dumbell revues appealed mostly to English Canadian veterans of the First World War. Many of their early songs such as "Oh, It's a Lovely War" contained many references to the Great War.¹⁵⁹ To appeal to a wider audience, the Dumbells gradually added more contemporary material and actresses, who appeared for the first time in the 1928 Dumbells revue Why Worry?.¹⁶⁰

Montreal also received musical revues from London's West End in the 1920s. Over the decade, twelve English revues were presented in the metropolis. All but one of these were staged at His Majesty's Theatre, Montreal's leading venue for high-quality British attractions.

The first and most successful of these London revues was Chu Chin Chow, which appeared before Montreal audiences in both the 1920-1921 and 1922-1923 theatre seasons. The North American company sent to Montreal was an exact replica of the original 1916 English production, currently enjoying its fourth year at His Majesty's Theatre, London.¹⁶¹ With its huge cast of 300, and its numerous costumes and scenes, Chu Chin Chow was the

¹⁵⁹Kallmann, p.287.

¹⁶⁰Ibid.

¹⁶¹Montreal Star, "Live News About Plays and Players," article, January 24, 1920, p.22.

most costly English production ever sent on tour. Based on an animated fable of ancient Baghdad, the large-scale production unfolded in fourteen different scenes.¹⁶²

Chu Chin Chow came to Montreal direct from a lengthy run at the Century Theatre in New York City. Its January 1920 première in Montreal attracted capacity audiences. Some fifteen thousand Montrealers applauded the sensational revue during its first week's run.¹⁶³ Its initial tour was so successful that Samuel Morgan-Powell accurately predicted that "Chu Chin Chow would be compelled to pay Montreal another visit before the year was out."¹⁶⁴ Seven months later, in fact, in August 1920, a return engagement of Chu Chin Chow opened Montreal's 1920-1921 theatre season. Once again, the spectacular revue generated great excitement in the city, and attracted capacity audiences. In view of the phenomenal demand for seats, the management of His Majesty's Theatre retained the show for a second week.¹⁶⁵ When the sensational show returned to His Majesty's Theatre for a third engagement in October 1922, it once again played to full houses.

Charlot's Revue of 1924 was another British revue which aroused great excitement in Montreal. Like Chu Chin Chow before it, Charlot's Revue came to Montreal in November 1924 as part of a six-month road tour, following a successful nine-month run on Broadway.¹⁶⁶ The show was brought to North America from London by the New York theatrical entrepreneur Arch Selwyn, and marked the beginning of stardom for the Toronto-

¹⁶²Montreal Star. "Summer Attractions," article, August 14, 1920, p.20.

¹⁶³Montreal Star. "Chu Chin Chow," boxed advertisement, January 31, 1920, p.24.

¹⁶⁴Montreal Star. "Chu Chin Chow Drawing Capacity Audiences All Week," review, February 3, 1920, p.22.

¹⁶⁵Montreal Star. "Summer Attractions," article, August 21, 1920, p.20.

¹⁶⁶Gerald Bordman, American Musical Theatre, p.384; Montreal Star, November 22,

born comedienne Beatrice Lillie. As on opening night at the Time Square Theatre on Broadway, the scene that stopped the show in Montreal was the comic number "March With Me," in which Lillie portrayed as a dignified "Britannia," tripped clumsily over her spear, shield, helmet, and ultimately her own feet.¹⁶⁷ This comical patriotic number surely struck a chord among the British-born spectators gathered at His Majesty's Theatre.

The one week engagement of Charlot's Revue at His Majesty's Theatre was not Beatrice Lillie's final visit to Montreal. As mentioned in the previous section, the comedy star returned to Montreal in June 1927 in Oh, Please!, her first American musical comedy. As in Charlot's Revue, Lillie was a smash hit in Oh, Please!, and sent her fans home in roars of laughter.¹⁶⁸

In the final week of May 1929, Lillie again took the city by storm in Noel Coward's musical revue This Year of Grace. Produced by the British impresario Charles Cochran, the revue was brought to America by Arch Selwyn with its original cast intact. Like Charlot's Revue five years before it, This Year of Grace was a smash hit on Broadway, where it played the Selwyn Theatre for seven months.¹⁶⁹ After Toronto, Montreal was the last of five cities, outside New York, to see the popular British revue.¹⁷⁰ The company returned to

1924, p.20.

¹⁶⁷Beatrice Lillie, Every Other Inch A Lady, (New York, Doubleday, 1972), pp.148-151; Montreal Star, "Charlot's Revue" is a Revelation in Art of Clever Entertainment," review, November 25, 1924, p.6; Montreal Gazette, "'Charlot's Revue' at His Majesty's Marked by Originality of Material and Finish of Execution," November 25, 1924, p.7.

¹⁶⁸Montreal Star, "Beatrice Lillie in "Oh, Please" Reveals Unique Individuality," review, May 31, 1927, p.6.

¹⁶⁹Montreal Star, "Next Week's Attractions," article, May 25, 1929, p.25.

¹⁷⁰Montreal Gazette, "Brilliant Revue at His Majesty's," review, May 28, 1929, p.14.

England aboard the White Star Liner, Regina, following the final one-week run at His Majesty's Theatre.¹⁷¹

This Year of Grace attracted hundreds of Montrealers, anxious to see the show's shining star - Beatrice Lillie. One such Montrealer was a young nineteen-year-old college student named Herbert Whittaker.¹⁷² While some Montrealers attended musical revues for their lavish spectacle and lovely chorus girls, others, like Whittaker, were attracted by their comic satire and sophisticated style. Whittaker, who later became a theatre critic for the Montreal Gazette in 1935, was particularly struck by Lillie's exceptional comic abilities:

I was absolutely astonished by the Lillie comedy style, as well as by her material. For me, as for so many North Americans, here was a brand new sophistication, all cheerful innuendo and sly comment.¹⁷³

Whittaker's recollections confirm the importance of the star system to the musical theatre of the 1920s. According to Whittaker, the success of This Year of Grace rested entirely on the sophisticated talent of its leading lady, Beatrice Lillie.

Postwar Montreal theatregoers were also entertained by Nikita Balieff's Chauve-Souris, a popular musical revue from Russia. Founded in Moscow on the eve of the Russian Revolution, the Chauve-Souris production company enjoyed successful runs in Paris and London before opening in New York in February 1922.¹⁷⁴ With its triumphant

¹⁷¹Montreal Star, "This Year of Grace," boxed advertisement, May 25, 1929, p.24.

¹⁷²Herbert Whittaker, Whittaker's Theatricals, (Toronto, Simon & Pierre, 1993), pp.119-120.

¹⁷³Ibid.

¹⁷⁴Balieff's Chauve-Souris, Special Theatre Programme, His Majesty's Theatre, May 10, 1924, McCord Museum Archives; Robert Baral, Revue: The Great Broadway Period, (New York, Fleet Press, 1962), p.177.

552-performance run, it was one of the most successful musical revues ever, on Broadway.¹⁷⁵

Like all other musical revues, the Chauve-Souris consisted of a succession of episodic song and dance numbers backed by different settings and decors. Its most colourful scene, the "March of the Wooden Soldiers," featured mechanical toy soldiers being magically brought to life.¹⁷⁶ The show's score by the Russian composer Alexei Archangelsky, included gypsy melodies, sentimental ballads, folk tunes, and ballet numbers.¹⁷⁷

Over the course of the decade, Chauve-Souris toured Montreal on four different occasions. During its first visit to the city in March 1924, the popular show was retained for an additional week, owing to strong public demand.¹⁷⁸ As mentioned in Chapter Two, the management of His Majesty's Theatre was able to effect this arrangement only by paying a \$5000 forfeit to the Albany Theatre, at which the Russian revue had contracted to play. To meet the great demand to see the show, two additional matinee performances were presented on Friday afternoons. Altogether, the sensational revue was performed eighteen times during its 1924 booking in Montreal.

Each performance of Chauve-Souris was introduced by its creator Nikita Balieff, in the following speech in broken English:

¹⁷⁵Gerald Bordman, American Musical Theatre, pp.368-369.

¹⁷⁶Montreal Star, "Chauve-Souris" is an Entertainment of Rare Beauty and Rare Wit," review, March 11, 1924, p.6.

¹⁷⁷Balieff's Chauve-Souris, Special Theatre Programme, His Majesty's Theatre, May 10, 1924, McCord Museum Archives.

¹⁷⁸Montreal Star, "'Chauve-Souris' Will Remain Here Another Week," article, March 15, 1924, p.20.

Good eefening, leddies and gentlemen, allow me to introduce myself. I am Balieff, director of the conferenciers of the "Chauve-Souris." It is my tuty of my manager, Mr. Morris Gest, who brought me to this country, to introduce myself. But he is afret - he spiks bat Eenglish, therefore I introduce myself. I, too, spik bat Eenglish, but I gif you my wort, in ten or twenty or forty years, I will spik better Eenglish, as you spik Russian. And now eef you haf nothing against, the pairformance will begin.¹⁷⁹

Through this introductory monologue, Balieff established an immediate intimacy with his audiences and set an amusing tone performance after performance.

The Chauve-Souris revue returned to Montreal in the second half of the decade in three revised editions that retained much of the production's original material. The show appeared at His Majesty's Theatre in the 1924-1925 and 1929-1930 theatre seasons, and again at the Princess Theatre during the busy 1927-1928 season. With it came a distinctive aura that was greatly appreciated by the cosmopolitan theatre-going public of Montreal.

In conclusion, the musical theatre repertoire of Montreal in the 1920s was richly diverse in origin and style and inextricably linked to its sources of supply in New York City. With the exception of sixteen Canadian revues staged by the Dumbells company, the Montreal musical stage was dominated by American, French, British and Russian productions touring Montreal after successful runs on Broadway. Occasionally, Montrealers got the opportunity to witness the premiere of a Broadway-bound show before New York. In this final decade of large-scale touring companies, Montreal theatregoers were particularly fortunate in the number and rich variety of musical productions offered to them. Over the course of the 1920s, His Majesty's, the Princess, and Saint-Denis Theatres presented a total of 1799 performances of 368 musical productions. The turning point for the city's musical repertoire was reached when the Princess Theatre became a venue for the

¹⁷⁹Robert Baral, p.177.

Shubert organisation of Broadway at the end of the 1925-1926 season. As Broadway flourished in the final prosperous years of the decade, the number and quality of roadshows sent to its Montreal satellite improved significantly. During these peak theatre years, both His Majesty's and the Princess Theatres mounted a different Broadway show almost every week. This abundance of musical theatre repertoire explains why Montrealers felt they were living in the cultural capital of Canada, with its northern equivalent of Broadway.

Although Toronto was also sent Broadway productions, its musical theatre repertoire in the 1920s appears to have been less diverse than that of Montreal. Montreal's financial predominance, larger and more cosmopolitan population, and closer geographical proximity to New York ensured it a regular supply of different kinds of musical attractions. As in the case of Broadway, the musical stage of postwar Montreal was rich in genre diversity, and divided between operetta, opera, musical comedy and revue. Each of these genres was distinct from the others, and strongly supported by different segments of Montreal's diverse theatregoing public. Operetta was the most frequently staged musical genre in Montreal and appealed to mostly middle and upper-class genteel theatregoers. As elsewhere, opera was the preferred lyric art form of the wealthiest families, and mainly attracted the city's older and more affluent reserved-seat theatre patrons. In contrast to these older genres, musical comedy attracted theatregoers of all ages and classes of society. Its very newness, simplicity, and fast-paced nature, appealed especially to younger Montrealers, across linguistic and cultural lines. Finally, musical revue catered to mostly middle-class businessmen, attracted by both the lovely chorus lines and catchy show music. Together, these various musical genres mirrored the city's theatregoing public, and greatly enhanced Montreal's reputation as a respectable northern satellite of Broadway.

CHAPTER FOUR

POLICE CENSORSHIP OF THE MONTREAL STAGE

The decade of the 1920s was marked by an abandonment of pre-war values and social mores and a reaction against the restraints and restrictions imposed during the Great War. After the Armistice, pleasure-seeking men and women across North America flocked to theatres, movie houses, and other recreational establishments in search of diversion. The continuous demand for newer and more exciting theatrical entertainment resulted in a liberalisation of outlook and behaviour on the stage which did not meet with universal acceptance. The overt laxity of manners, the depiction of social morality and the freedom of expression on the postwar stage produced a backlash from conservative forces who yearned nostalgically for a return to the stability and continuity of established traditions.

The years after 1919 witnessed several attacks on stage morals across North America. In Philadelphia in 1921, the Police halted performances of the play The Demi-Virgin by Avery Hopwood.¹ In New York City in the same year, there was a public clamour for the appointment of a theatre censor, or "mentor," against which authors, dramatists and performers organised a campaign to prevent the creation of any such office.² The following year, the Reverend J.H. Holmes declared that he found nine out of the thirty-nine plays currently being staged in New York City "indecent," and renewed the cry for

¹New York Times, "Pittsburgh Halts the 'Demi-Virgin'." October 2, 1921, p.22.

²New York Times, "Prepare to Combat Censorship of Stage." December 24, 1921, p.7.

censorship.³ Rabbi Stephen S. Wise concurred, on the grounds that indecent plays were driving the stage towards some form of state control.⁴ By April 1922, a list had been compiled of three-hundred citizens from whose ranks censorship juries might be picked.⁵

Similar trends were to be noted in Boston, where official city censor John M. Casey had the authority to suppress any theatre production he deemed objectionable.⁶ Casey imposed cuts and alterations on unacceptable scenarios at previews presented in New York, or shortly after their premières in Boston. In Toronto, chief censor Harry Wodson, after the manner of the English Lord Chamberlain, scrutinised and amended the scripts of plays before their presentation on stage.⁷

In Montreal, the most outspoken opponent of libertine theatrical performances was the Roman Catholic Church. On July 25th 1920, Pope Benedict XV had published his letter *Bonum sane*, in which he deplored the depths of corruption and depravity to which the current levels of social behaviour had fallen.⁸ The tone of this denunciation was echoed down the grades of the hierarchical network to the pulpits of the parish churches of Quebec.

Although much weakened after its period of greatest influence in the late nineteenth century, the Church continued to oppose the theatre, particularly in the new urban and

³New York Times, "Wise Asked Woods to End Rank Play," March 13, 1922, p.18.

⁴Ibid.

⁵New York Times, "Second Thoughts on First Nights," April 23, 1922, VI, p.1.

⁶Elliot Norton, Broadway Down East, (Boston, Public Library of Boston, 1978), pp.83-84

⁷Oxford Companion to Canadian Theatre, p.82.

⁸Jean Laflamme & Rémi Tourangeau, L'Église et le théâtre au Québec, (Montreal, Fides, 1979), p.275.

industrial setting. During the 1920s, Quebec ecclesiastics saw themselves as moral guardians of the social order, and the theatre as another form of urban decadence. In the eyes of Quebec's senior clergy, the theatre, objectionable at any time, was a particularly pernicious influence on Sunday, "la journée du Seigneur." The Church maintained its edict that the Sabbath remain a day devoted exclusively to religious observances. It was especially critical of plays imported from New York and Paris which it considered to represent a fountainhead of ideas and attitudes prejudicial to the survival of the traditional French Canadian way of life.

In its campaign against the theatre, the Church occasionally requested the intervention of municipal authorities.⁹ Throughout the 1920s, when Montreal lacked an official theatre censor, the prohibition of theatrical performances lay in the jurisdiction of City Hall and its Police Department. After a production was adjudged to be immoral, the most common and effective means of theatre censorship was the closing of the theatre by city officials and the arrest of the offending performers.

This chapter examines clerical opposition to theatrical activity as revealed in two instances of theatre censorship by the Montreal Police, which evoked heated public polemics. The first of these theatrical controversies occurred in 1921 when Montreal Police censored the theatre posters of the touring American musical production Aphrodite. The second and more celebrated case of theatre censorship in postwar Montreal occurred in February 1930, when members of the Compagnie Française d'Opérette de Paris were placed under arrest by police prior to their seventh performance of the modern French operetta Phi-

⁹Mireille Barrière, "La Société Canadienne-Française et le Théâtre Lyrique à Montréal entre 1840 et 1913," (Ph.D. Thesis, Laval University, 1990), pp.371-372.

Phi. This unusual and controversial example of the exercise of censorial power precipitated an enormous public debate, and ultimately resulted in the appointment of a municipal theatre censor. Through analysis of the various responses to this arbitrary police action, it could be argued that Quebec was not dominated by any single cultural ethos, but was open to a variety of progressive and international influences. The public agitation reveals a deeply polarised society struggling to define itself culturally, in the midst of rapid social and economic change.

The Church's Campaign Against Foreign Theatre

The most virulent attacks against theatrical activity in Montreal in the decade after the First World War came from the Roman Catholic hierarchy. One of the strongest critics of Montreal's postwar stage was the city's ailing Archbishop Paul Bruchési. Since his appointment in 1897, Bruchési had condemned the productions of several touring theatre companies, including that of Sarah Bernhardt in 1905.¹⁰ As part of his vigorous campaign against the theatre, Bruchési strongly endorsed the 1907 Lord Day's Act, a Federal law which forbade the operation of commercialised amusements on Sundays.¹¹ During the 1913-1914 theatre season, the operas Thais and Louise were forced from the Montreal stage after Bruchési informed municipal authorities of his judgement of them as anti-clerical and

¹⁰Jean LaFlamme, L'Eglise et le théâtre au Québec, pp.237-239; Jean Béraud, 350 ans de Théâtre au Canada Français, (Ottawa, Cercle du Livre de France, 1958), pp.117-118; Oxford Companion to Canadian Theatre, p.81.

¹¹Jean Béraud, pp.117-118; Sharon Meen, "Holy Day or Holiday?: The Giddy Trolley and the Canadian Sunday 1890-1914," Urban History Review, No. 1 (1980), pp.53-55.

immoral.¹² Bruchési continued his opposition to the Montreal stage into the postwar era as showed in the following denunciation:

Le théâtre rivalise avec le cinéma dans sa course à l'argent et à la corruption. Par ses titres alléchants, ses affiches éhontées, ses drames cyniques, par l'annonce nouvelle et vraiment odieuse de représentations dites "de nuit," il entretient une industrie qui est intolérable dans une ville honnête.¹³

In his crusade against the theatre, Bruchési also denounced the city's daily newspapers for publicising the city's entertainment industry.

Monsignor Georges Gauthier, the auxiliary Archbishop of Montreal, supported his titular superior in the condemnation of theatrical activity. Like Bruchési, Gauthier also wrote a number of pastoral letters over the course of the postwar decade, condemning what was in his view the nefarious influence of the commercial theatre. To his eyes, the modern theatre constituted a diabolical force: "le théâtre est devenu l'une des distractions mondaines les plus répandues."¹⁴ According to Monsignor Gauthier, the modern theatre was a dangerous vehicle of anti-Christian thought conducive to immoral behaviour. With its frequent references to adultery and free love, the theatre was a threat to the integrity of the individual, the family, and the nation. In Gauthier's view, no other institution did more to undermine the principles of Roman Catholicism than the contemporary theatre.

¹²Mireille Barrière, "La Société Canadienne-Française et le Théâtre Lyrique à Montréal entre 1840 et 1913," (Ph.D. Thesis, Laval University, 1990), p.360.

¹³Jean Laflamme, p.282.

¹⁴Jean Laflamme, p.293.

In a pastoral letter, of which an extract was published in the prohibitionist Catholic monthly La Tempérance, Gauthier singled out the pernicious influences of contemporary Parisian productions:

Il n'est pas possible que ce que l'on nous en montre, en ce moment à Montréal, soit le vrai visage de la France. Par simple délicatesse patriotique, l'on devrait une fois pour toutes, éloigner de nos scènes théâtrales, ces productions malsaines qui, à tous les points de vue, ne peuvent faire que du mal.¹⁵

Modern Parisian productions were especially targeted by clerical authorities because many reflected the new liberal tendencies of postwar Paris. Throughout the 1920s, Paris was a leading cultural centre of liberalism, social non-conformism, sexual liberty, and frivolity.¹⁶ Censorship regulations in postwar Paris offered more liberal expression than those of other Western cities.¹⁷ The frequent references to sexual promiscuity, adultery and divorce in many Parisian productions were deemed to be morally dangerous to the survival of French-Canadian values. Church officials feared that immoral Parisian productions on tour could stimulate similarly improper behaviour among Montreal's theatre-going public.

¹⁵La Tempérance, "Le mauvais théâtre: une école du vice," January 1926, Vol. 20, #8, pp.240-241; The Catholic monthly La Tempérance also published a series of articles by the Franciscan writer Vincent de Carisey, who equated the modern theatre with barbarism and paganism. See La Tempérance, February 1928, Vol. 22, #9, pp.280-2; March 1928, Vol. 22, #10, pp.314-15; April 1928, Vol. 22, #11, pp.340-342.

¹⁶William Wiser, The Crazy Years: Paris in the Twenties, (New York, Atheneum, 1983), pp.20-23, 30-31, 70-74, 109, 161

¹⁷Modris Eksteins, Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age, (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1989), p.44.

In short, Montreal's Catholic hierarchy did not want the city to accept or emulate the values of Paris.¹⁸

Quebec's postwar nationalists also urged all good French-Canadians to abstain from unpatriotic forms of recreational amusement. One of the province's most vocal nationalistic groups in the 1920s was L'Action Française. Led by the priest-historian Lionel Groulx, this group was greatly alarmed by Quebec's rapid industrialisation, increasing urbanisation, and foreign economic and cultural domination, especially by the United States.¹⁹ Like the Church, Quebec nationalists abhorred the powerful forces which were modernising and redefining Quebec society at a frightening pace.

L'Action Française was particularly troubled by the predominance of American popular culture in postwar Montreal. In its view, Quebec society was rapidly being infiltrated by American mores and materialistic values, which had a corrupting effect:

Le mirage américain continuera à enivrer notre population, tant que des mesures coercitives ne seront prises contre l'introduction des films judéo-américains, la littérature des magazines, et la pénétration des danses et de la musique qui modifient tour à tour l'idéal et les mœurs de notre peuple...²⁰

¹⁸Condemnations of Montreal's theatre scene were not restricted solely to the province's French-speaking Roman Catholic hierarchy. Reverend E.I. Hart, a prominent Methodist pastor of Montreal, and editor of the temperance page of the English-language Protestant weekly the *Montreal Witness*, was a staunch opponent of all forms of recreational night-life, including live theatre. As Secretary of the Quebec branch of the Prohibition Federation of Canada, Hart was particularly alarmed by the great number of young Montrealers "caught in the meshes of the salacious movie and theatre and the 'dance and dine and wine' hotels and restaurants" of the city. See *Montreal Witness and Canadian Homestead*, "Quebec's Temperance Educational Campaign," January 16, 1924, p.6.

¹⁹Susan M. Trofimenkoff, *Action Française: French Canadian Nationalism in the Twenties*, (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1975), p.40; *The Dream of Nation: A Social and Intellectual History of Quebec*, (Toronto, Gage Publishing, 1983), pp.218-229.

²⁰*L'Action Française*, December 1927, p.339

As the Hollywood motion picture industry gained ground in the 1920s, live theatrical productions as well as American films were often denounced simultaneously. Quebec nationalists viewed any intrusion of American culture, whether in the form of popular music, stage productions or films, as a dangerous threat to French Canadian survival: the powerful American entertainment industry threatened to transform Quebecers into French-speaking Americans.²¹ L'Action Française and other nationalistic associations favoured recreational pursuits that conformed to their doctrinaire concept of Quebec's distinct cultural heritage.

The Catholic Church's crusade against commercial amusements intensified following the disastrous Laurier Palace fire. On Sunday, January 9, 1927, a tragically high number of children perished in a conflagration at the Laurier Palace Movie Theatre on St. Catherine Street East.²² According to the official report of District Chief of Fire Services Doolan, the fire broke out in the theatre's overcrowded upper gallery, during the screening of a comic film ironically entitled "Get' Em Young."²³ As shouts of "Au feu!" echoed throughout the hall, many children driven to panic were trapped in the inferno. Large numbers of stampeding children jammed into a locked exit, where many were crushed to

²¹Susan Trofimenkoff, The Dream of Nation: A Social and Intellectual History of Quebec, p.224: This discontent also presaged the rumblings of young provincial Liberals. See Bernard Vigod, Quebec Before Duplessis, (Montreal, McGill-Queen's Press, 1986); Patricia Dirks, The Failure of L'Action Libérale nationale, (Montreal, McGill-Queen's Press, 1991).

²²Robert Rumilly, Histoire de la Province de Québec, Vol. 29, (Montreal, Fides, 1955), p.14; Montreal Star, January 10, 1927, p.1.

²³Montreal Star, "Fire Chief Gives Official Report," January 11, 1927, p.9.

death or died of asphyxiation.²⁴ Altogether, seventy-eight children between the ages of five and seventeen were killed in the overcrowded cinema which had no arrangements for emergency evacuation.²⁵

News of the tragedy horrified much of the Western world. Within hours of the catastrophe, expressions of sympathy poured into the office of Montreal Mayor Méderic Martin from across Europe and North America.²⁶ At home, the Laurier Palace disaster raised to a fever pitch the level of debate regarding the operation of commercialised entertainment on Sundays. The fact that all the victims were helpless unaccompanied children, left to their own devices on a Sunday afternoon, was immediately emphasised and denounced by spokesmen of the Roman Catholic Church.

At the funeral service held at the Church of the Nativity in the Hochelaga ward for thirty-nine of the fire victims, Archbishop Gauthier exploited the tragedy to warn of the moral and physical dangers posed by the unrestricted operation of recreational establishments on Sundays. To prevent future calamities, Gauthier demanded the immediate suspension of all commercial recreational activity on Sundays:

I came here to give you a word of sympathy. And I hope that this event will carry its lesson. Let us remember that this horrible disaster took place on a Sunday. Let us also remember that the tendency of today is not toward the sanctification of the Sunday. I tell you that public opinion should impose

²⁴Ibid.; Montreal Witness and Canadian Homestead, "Passed On the Waste Basket," January 19, 1927, p.5.

²⁵Montreal Star, "Survivor Asserts Theatre Balcony Was Overcrowded," January 10, 1927, p.5 Montreal Witness and Canadian Homestead, "Sunday Theatre Calamity in Montreal," January 12, 1927, p.8; "Passed On the Waste Basket," January 19, 1927, p.5.

²⁶Montreal Star, "Toll in Laurier Theatre Panic 77. All Children: Throngs Visit Morgue," January 10, 1927, p.1.

respect for the Lord's Day. Why do our legislators leave these places open on Sunday? Let us pray that our legislators may find a law that cannot be attacked, to remedy the situation. I am first to demand such a law, and to cry aloud for it. I ask it in the name of public morals, and of these little coffins.²⁷

Within days of the Laurier Palace fire, thirteen associations pressured the government to establish a Royal Commission to investigate the causes of the tragedy. Among these were l'Association Saint-Jean Baptiste de Montréal, l'Association catholique de la Jeunesse canadienne-française, l'Association catholique des Voyageurs de commerce, and La Ligue du Dimanche.²⁸ These nationalistic groupings staunchly declared their opposition to any further increase in the number of movie houses screening American films in Montreal, and supported the closure of all movie theatres on Sundays, as well as stricter censorship laws, and the restriction of admission to cinemas to all children under sixteen years of age.²⁹

In response to the public outcry against the Laurier Palace catastrophe, the Provincial Government of Louis-Alexandre Taschereau established a Royal Commission to investigate the reasons for the disaster. Completing its report within five months, the Boyer Commission recommended the retention of Sunday performances at Montreal theatres, but the exclusion from admission of all children under sixteen years of age, whether

²⁷Montreal Star, "100,000 Bow in Sorrow as Cortege of Hearses Passes Through Streets," January 11, 1927, p.17, Le Devoir, "Que nos Legislatuers fassent donc des lois pour empêcher notre jeunesse d'aller au cinéma," January 11, 1927, p.1.

²⁸Robert Rumilly, p.15.

²⁹Antonin Dupont, "Les Relations entre L'Eglise et L'Etat sous Louis-Alexandre Taschereau, 1920-1936," (Ph.D. Thesis, McGill University, 1971), pp.173-176.

accompanied or not.³⁰ The Commission also concluded that the cinema was not inherently immoral, and the citizenry, and the working class in particular, opposed the banning of Sunday performances.³¹

Judge Louis Boyer's recommendation that commercial enterprises be allowed to operate on Sundays drew an angry reaction from the Catholic press.³² La Semaine Religieuse de Montréal complained that the province's clerical authorities were not consulted during the investigation.³³ The same publication also opposed the Commission's recommendation that commercialised amusements be permitted on Sundays on the grounds that such a provision contravened the Lord Day's Act.³⁴

As a result of the Laurier Palace tragedy, there was a hardening in the position of the Roman Catholic Church towards Montreal's entertainment industry. The church's strongest denunciation of commercialised amusements on Sundays took the form of a pastoral letter written collectively by the Archbishops and Bishops of Quebec and Ottawa. Entitled "Sur la Sanctification du Dimanche," the collective letter recommended in the strongest terms the closure of all recreational establishments on Sundays. The letter deplored that theatrical performances and other forms of commercialised amusement were replacing Sunday

³⁰Castell Hopkins ed., Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs 1927-1928, (Toronto, 1928), p.430.

³¹Ibid.

³²Telesforo Tajuelo, "Censure et Société: Un siècle d'Interdit Cinématographique au Québec, Tome I," (Ph.D. Thesis, Sorbonne University, 1998), pp.112-115.

³³La Semaine Religieuse de Montréal, "Après les conclusions de l'enquête sur le cinéma," September 1927, p.548.

³⁴Antonin Dupont, pp.176-177; La Semaine Religieuse de Québec, September 1927, p.19.

religious observances among many Quebecers. Theatre and motion pictures were singled out for particular mention:

Il s'agit, en particulier, des représentations théâtrales et cinématographiques, qui remplacent pour plusieurs l'édifiant spectacle de nos offices liturgiques et qui donnent chez nous, les dimanches et les jours de fêtes, au mépris de nos lois ecclésiastiques et civiles. Ces représentations, par leur multiplicité et leur allure d'opérations financières et industrielles, constituent aujourd'hui une véritable profanation du jour du Seigneur que la conscience catholique ne peut pas tolérer.³⁵

The Church urged all faithful Catholics to abstain from attending all improper recreational activities, especially on the Sabbath. "La Journée du Seigneur," it concluded, must be respected.

Despite this strongly worded pastoral denunciation, which was published in Le Devoir, L'Action Catholique and other Catholic newspapers and periodicals, theatrical productions continued to be staged in Montreal on Sundays, especially at the French-language Saint-Denis Theatre.³⁶ For example, during the 1927-1928 theatre season, La Compagnie d'Opérette de Paris began its three-day run of Miss Helyett on Sunday December 4, 1927.³⁷ Moreover, in the following 1928-1929 theatre season, two performances of Les Dragons de Villars were presented at the Saint-Denis playhouse on Christmas Day, while Les Mousquetaires au Couvent was staged on New Year's Day.

³⁵Mandements. Lettres Pastorales, Circulaires et autres documents publiés dans le Diocèse de Montréal, (Montreal, 1940), Vol. 18, pp.54-58.

³⁶Le Devoir, "Directions," November 28, 1927, p.1; La Semaine Religieuse de Montréal December 1927, p.757-761.

³⁷See Appendix I.

1929.³⁸ Thus, the Saint-Denis Theatre remained in operation seven days a week, regardless of statutory civil or religious holidays.

"L'Affaire Aphrodite"

The earliest foreign production in the 1920s to arouse the wrath of Roman Catholic Church officials was the American musical Aphrodite, which arrived in Montreal in February 1921. Based on Pierre Louy's controversial novel about the decadence of court life in Ancient Egypt, the piece was a large-scale and extravagantly mounted spectacle.³⁹ In addition to its cast of 300, Aphrodite featured elaborate tableaux and intricate dance sequences created by the world-famous ballet choreographer Michel Fokine.⁴⁰ The musical was produced by the successful partnership of Roy Comstock and Morris Gest, and came to Canada direct from a successful run on Broadway.

On February 3, 1921, Ernest Decary, the Chairman of the Montreal Administrative Commission, received a letter from Canon Joseph Harbour of the Montreal Archdiocese, requesting him to enquire into the morality of Aphrodite. "Il est réellement difficile que ce roman, tel qu'il a été publié," Harbour warned, "soit mis en tableaux devant la foule, sans être pour le moins très suggestif."⁴¹

³⁸See Appendix I.

³⁹Gerald Bordman, The American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle (New York, 1978), p.345.

⁴⁰Ibid.: La Presse, poster advertisement, February 12, 1921, p.4

⁴¹Letter to M. Ernest Decary from Canon Harbour, February 3, 1921, Archives of the Archdiocese of Montreal. Canon Harbour was also active in the Church's crusade against

In a preliminary response to Canon Harbour's communication, Chairman Decary assured the Church authorities that the representation of immorality would not be tolerated. He promised to send a municipal official to the opening night performance of Aphrodite to ensure that nothing offensive or indecent was presented.⁴² If anything objectionable was reported, Decary maintained, the show was to be immediately banned.

Apart from Canon Harbour's enquiry into the morality of Aphrodite itself, most of the controversy surrounding the production was precipitated by the show's highly suggestive advance publicity. The posters advertising the show carried a line drawing of a lightly clad Greek goddess, closely resembling the currently world-famous swimming champion Annette Kellerman. Never before had such a suggestive image appeared on a theatrical advertisement in the city.

These controversial posters drew angry reactions within days of their multiple presentation in the city's streets and newspapers. For example, the Ligue des Bonnes Moeurs, a Catholic citizens' Committee concerned with public morality, dispatched the following letter of protest to the Archdiocese of Montreal:

Monseigneur,

Voulez-vous me permettre d'attirer votre attention sur les annonces publiées dans les grands journaux tels que La Presse et le Star de Samedi dernier et du Samedi précédent, invitant sous une forme très attrayante, les gens à aller entendre "APHRODITE" pièce réputée très mauvaise, comme d'ailleurs le titre peut le faire entendre. Depuis quelques

the cinema. See Telesforo Tajuelo, "Censure et Société: un siècle d'Interdit Cinématographique au Québec (Tome 1). (Ph.D. Thesis, Sorbonne University, 1998), pp.113-115.

⁴²Letter to Joseph Harbour from Ernest Decary, February 10, 1921, Archives of the Archdiocese of Montreal.

jours, des affiches sur les clôtures dans les rues de Montréal, confirment le doute qu'on pouvait avoir sur le caractère de cette pièce, si toutefois il était possible d'en avoir.

Les membres de notre ligue se demandent, comment ils peuvent intervenir. C'est la morale publique qui est outragée, et leurs voix ne seraient peut-être pas écoutées, parce que cette ligue représente des comités paroissiaux qui n'ont pas beaucoup d'influence aux yeux du public.

Nous prenons la liberté de vous signaler ces desordres.

Bien respectueusement à vous,

Arthur Larammé,

Sécretaire⁴³

According to Larammé, the Aphrodite posters were absolutely scandalous and unfit for public exhibition.

On Friday February 11, 1921, Fred Howarth, the manager of His Majesty's Theatre, was notified by Police Chief Bélanger that his posters were highly objectionable, and would either have to be modified or taken down within fourteen hours.⁴⁴ Howarth immediately complied with the Police Department ruling, and ordered his staff to cover the female figure on the posters with strips of white paper.⁴⁵ By the following day, all but the head of the goddess was covered. In a symbolic gesture, Howarth dispatched tickets to the Police Department for the opening night performance.⁴⁶

⁴³Letter from Arthur Larammé to Monseigneur de la Durantaye, Vicar General of Montreal Archdiocese, February 10, 1921, Archives of the Archdiocese of Montreal.

⁴⁴Montreal Star, "Not One But Every Poster Must be Stamped Says Chief Bélanger," article, February 14, 1921, p.3; Montreal Herald, "Aphrodite Posters Under Police Ban," article, February 14, 1921, p.5.

⁴⁵Ibid.; Montreal Gazette, article, February 14, 1921, p.4

⁴⁶Montreal Star, "Not One But Every Poster Must be Stamped Says Chief Bélanger," article, February 14, 1921, p.3; "Aphrodite" at His Majesty's Theatre a Beautiful Spectacle," review, February 15, 1921, p.6; La Patrie, "Bandelettes aux affiches d'Aphrodite," article, February 14, 1921, p.7.

The enormous attention and controversy surrounding Aphrodite greatly benefitted the box office. During its one-week run, the musical attracted thousands of Montreal theatregoers, especially curious male patrons.⁴⁷ The American roadshow received mostly positive reviews from the Montreal press, and appears to have been generally free of anything overly suggestive or scandalous. In his favourable review of the production, Samuel Morgan-Powell reported that the spectacle was "refreshingly devoid of any the filth of the novel."⁴⁸ According to Powell, the police representative sent to attend the show reported that "nothing offensive or immoral" was witnessed.⁴⁹ Among the city's French-language newspapers, La Patrie also reported that Aphrodite featured "rien d'obscène ou de franchement condamnable."⁵⁰ According to the daily, there had been no need to censor the billboard posters of the show. In the view of its entertainment critic, the morality of stage productions was not an appropriate subject of jurisdiction for the Montreal Police Department:

Tout cela prouve que nous manquons vraiment de censure compétente à Montréal, et qu'on devrait confier à d'autres qu'à des policiers, le soin de dire si tel objet d'art ou tel spectacle peut-être offert sans danger au public.⁵¹

⁴⁷Montreal Star, "Aphrodite at His Majesty's Theatre a Beautiful Spectacle," review, February 15, 1921, p.6; La Presse, "Aphrodite," review, February 15, 1921, p.15.

⁴⁸Montreal Star, "Aphrodite" at His Majesty's Theatre a Beautiful Spectacle," review, February 15, 1921, p.6.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰La Patrie, "Aphrodite au Majesté," review, February 15, 1921, p.9.

⁵¹La Patrie, "Les Policiers sont-ils bien les seuls censeurs reconnus?," February 19, 1921, p.18.

At the time, no further action was taken to implement the appointment of any municipal functionary charged with screening and authorising the presentation of theatre productions. Such an expedient was to wait another nine years, and the outbreak of an even greater public scandal.

"L'Affaire Phi-Phi"

The most celebrated case of theatre censorship by the Montreal police occurred in February 1930, when members of the cast of the Compagnie Française d'Opérette de Paris were arrested just minutes before their seventh performance of the modern Parisian operetta Phi-Phi. The production of Phi-Phi had opened in Paris with its original cast at the Bouffes-Parisiens on November 13, 1918, two days after the signing of the Armistice to end the First World War.⁵² Within weeks of its première, the three-act operetta had taken Paris by storm. Over the course of the decade, it also enjoyed successful runs in Brussels, Berlin, Vienna, and London, where its book and lyrics were modified for British audiences.⁵³ Its happy, fast-paced music by Henri Christiné and witty humorous lyrics by Albert Willemetz accurately reflected the liberalism and optimism sweeping across postwar Paris and the Western world.

Set in Ancient Greece, the story-line of Phi-Phi is frivolous in style, and revolves around the efforts of the sculptor Phidias, or "Phi-Phi pour les intimes" to complete a series of statues representing the themes of Love and Virtue for Pericles, the Athenian head-of-

⁵²Richard Traubner, Operetta: A Theatrical History, (London, Victor Gallancz, 1984), p.307.

⁵³Richard Traubner, p.308.

state.⁵⁴ Comic complications arise when Phi-Phi succumbs to the charms of his winsome female model Aspasia, while his wife, Mme. Phidias, falls for the youth posing for the statue of Love, Ardimédon.

On the evening of Wednesday, February 26, 1930, seventeen cast members of the Compagnie Française d'Opérette were arrested by Montreal Police in their dressing rooms just moments before the opening act of Phi-Phi.⁵⁵ The Compagnie Française d'Opérette had been brought to Montreal by Albert Gauvin in January 1930. Like the other touring French troupes that preceded it, the company's artists were all drawn from professionals of the leading theatres and music halls of Paris, and featured the popular comedian Henri Neil and the young baritone Jean Deiss of the Théâtre Marigny, Jane Montagne of l'Opéra Comique, and Pierre Dorly of the Paris Casino.⁵⁶

These artists were arrested in Montreal on charges of taking part in an "immoral, indecent and obscene production."⁵⁷ As notice of the show's cancellation was given and patrons were refunded their entrance-money, the actors were escorted to Police headquarters

⁵⁴Ibid.: Claude Dufresne, Histoire de L'Opérette, (Paris, Fernand Nathan, 1981), p.101.

⁵⁵Montreal Herald, "Stars and Chorus Nabbed When Sleuths Raid Show," February 27, 1930, p.1; Montreal Star, "Actors Arrested in Local Theatre," February 27, 1930, p.3; La Patrie, "Arrestations de 17 artistes du St. Denis," February 27, 1930, p.1; Le Devoir, "La Troupe d'Opérette arrêtée en bloc," February 27, 1930, p.3.

⁵⁶La Patrie, "La troupe française de Comédies Musicales et d'Opérettes modernes," January 11, 1930, p.35; La Presse, "Phidias fait rigoler au théâtre Saint-Denis," February 24, 1930, p.8.

⁵⁷Montreal Herald, "Stars and Chorus Nabbed When Sleuths Raid Show," February 27, 1930, p.1.

in four cars.⁵⁸ Altogether, the arrested artists numbered four men and thirteen women. Also arrested was a local fifteen year-old chorus girl, which was later arraigned in Juvenile Court.⁵⁹

After three hours detention, the performers were released on \$15.00 bail each, which was paid by Joseph Cardinal, the proprietor of the Saint-Denis Theatre.⁶⁰ On the following day Léon Marchal, the lawyer representing the touring company, pleaded "non coupable" to charges that the artists had participated in an immoral production.⁶¹ Marchal also vehemently protested against the manner in which the Parisian performers had been treated.

On February 28, two days after the police raid at the Saint-Denis Theatre, La Presse published the angry protest of Xavier Rogé, the musical director of La Compagnie Française d'Opérette de Paris. The author of seventeen operatic librettos, Rogé was outraged by the arrest of his company's artists and vowed to form a protest committee to exclude Quebec from inclusion in the circuit for French touring companies:

Les intérêts artistiques de la production française méritent d'être sauvegardés: la malheureuse affaire de mercredi soir dernier sera relatée à mes camarades de France et elle aura une grave répercussion au sein de nos sociétés d'auteurs dramatiques. A Paris, lorsqu'une pièce n'est pas aimée on

⁵⁸La Patrie, "Arrestations de 17 artistes du St. Denis," February 27, 1930, p.1.

⁵⁹Montreal Star, "Actors Arrested in Local Theatre," February 27, 1930, p.3; Montreal Herald, "Stars and Chorus Nabbed When Sleuths Raid Show," February 27, 1930, p.1; La Presse, "Il serait fait deux nouvelles arrestations," February 27, 1930, p.1.

⁶⁰La Patrie, "Arrestations de 17 artistes du St. Denis," February 27, 1930, p.1; Jean Béraud, 350 ans de théâtre au Canada Français, (Ottawa, Le Cercle du livre de France, 1958), p.202.

⁶¹Le Devoir, "La troupe d'Opérette arrêtée en bloc," February 27, 1930, p.3; La Presse, "Il serait fait deux nouvelles arrestations," February 27, 1930, p.1.

la censure ou on demande au directeur de la retirer de l'affiche, mais on n'emprisonne pas les acteurs!⁶²

Rogé also vowed never to return to Montreal again. After further protests against their humiliating arrest, the artists departed for Paris via New York on Saturday March 1.⁶³

As distinct from the previous case of police censorship in 1921, the charges of immorality directed against the cast of Phi-Phi were based on the lyrics and libretto of the operetta, rather than on the costumes worn by the artists. The plot of Phi-Phi differed in content from those of previous operettas staged in Montreal, and poked fun at marital infidelity, and was highly risqué. Much of the libretto contained satirical lines and double-entendres. For example, when describing irresistible female seductiveness, Aspasia sings:

Bien chapeautée, gantée, Bien corsetée.
Une femme, une femme.
Séduira toujours les messieurs.⁶⁴

At the end of Act I, Ardimédon declares himself an advocate of free love:

Pour l'amour
Je m'crois des dispositions.
A Cythère j'ai pris des leçons.
J'suis même allé à Singapour!
Pour l'amour
Je m'sens tell'ment, en effet
Fait
Qu' pour vous plaire,
J'veux bien faire,
Nuit et jour,
L'Amour!⁶⁵

⁶²La Presse. "Protestation de M. X. Rogé." February 28, 1930, p.29.

⁶³La Patrie. "Départ de la troupe d'Opérette." March 3, 1930, p.8

⁶⁴Claude Dufresne, Histoire de l'Opérette, p.102.

⁶⁵Albert Willemetz & Fabien Sollar, Phi-Phi (libretto), (Paris, Éditions Francis Salabert, 1919), p.42. Collection Albert Duquesne, Bibliothèque municipale de Montréal.

In addition to its risqué themes of promiscuity and adultery, Phi-Phi featured a number of dance sequences performed by young women in revealing costumes. As mentioned above, one of these chorus girls was only fifteen years old. For Quebec's clerical and nationalist elite, the very thought of an under-age girl dancing on the stage was absolutely intolerable. The place of women, the Church maintained, was in the home as mothers and wives.⁶⁶

As in the case of the censorship of the billboard posters of Aphrodite in 1921, Montreal moved to censor Phi-Phi after a number of complaints against the show. Many of these were brought to the attention of the city's municipal officials by the French-language Catholic newspaper Le Devoir. In its edition of February 27th 1930, the daily reported that "c'est une lectrice de notre journal qui a prévenu par notre entremise les autorités municipales de l'immoralité du spectacle donné au Saint-Denis."⁶⁷ On the following day, Le Devoir announced that "C'est par dizaines que nous sont venues au téléphone et par lettres les dénonciations du dernier spectacle, de la part de gens qui ne sont pas scrupuleux, mais qu'il a revoltés."⁶⁸ In short, it was through Le Devoir that municipal officials were notified of the controversial operetta playing at the Saint-Denis Theatre.

The arrest on February 26 of the Parisian cast of Phi-Phi precipitated enormous controversy in Montreal, and a heated journalistic polemic was waged between the province's Catholic and liberal newspapers. The nationalist Le Devoir was the first

⁶⁶Toriménkoff, The Dream of Nation: A Social and Intellectual History of Quebec p.229.

⁶⁷Le Devoir, "La troupe d'opérette arrêtée en bloc." February 27, 1930, p.3.

⁶⁸Le Devoir, "Si c'est cela de "l'art français"....." February 28, 1930, p.1.

Montreal newspaper to champion the police censorship of the controversial operetta. In a front-page editorial entitled "Si c'est cela de l'art français," senior editor Georges Pelletier justified police intervention against the "obscene" operetta, whose celebration of love outside marriage he found particularly deplorable.⁶⁹ Like other devout Catholics, Pelletier saw the amoral treatment of adultery as an attack on the sanctity of family life in Quebec. The city's impresarii had invited police intervention by their failure to select more suitable French attractions:

Qui dicte à tels impresarii le choix des pièces qu'ils viennent faire jouer ici par des troupes recrutées là-bas, pièces dont les trois quarts et demi n'ont eu outre-mer qu'un succès de curiosité basse et malsaine, et finissent par choir dans la boue du ruisseau dont elles n'eussent jamais dû sortir?⁷⁰

Pelletier and his nationalist readership favoured classic French writers and playwrights, and were apprehensive of what they perceived as the pernicious influences of the modern and liberal postwar Parisian theatre. Pelletier's condemnatory editorial was also reprinted in the March 3, 1930 issue of the Quebec City Catholic daily L'Action Catholique.⁷¹

Albert Gauvin, the impresario of the Compagnie Française d'Opérette de Paris was quick to respond to Pelletier's criticism. In a letter written to Le Devoir, Gauvin defended his theatrical record and accused Pelletier of being hostile to French cultural presentations. "Est-ce votre but ultime," Gauvin demanded, "d'enrayer complètement en notre ville les manifestations françaises sous forme théâtrale?"⁷² In a sarcastic tone, Gauvin challenged

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹L'Action Catholique, "Si c'est cela de l'art français".... March 3, 1930, p.3.

⁷²Le Devoir, "M. Gauvin veut s'expliquer," March 3, 1930, p.2.

Pelletier to assume the responsibilities of selecting Montreal's repertoire for the upcoming theatre season.

The Compagnie Française d'Opérette de Paris was supported in its resistance to the police suppression of Phi-Phi by the province's liberal press. On the same day that La Presse carried Rogé's protest, the liberal daily Le Canada ran an editorial denouncing the police raid. Entitled "En marge d'une arrestation," the short but blunt editorial deplored the use of police repression to censor an operetta, particularly at the end of its ten-performance run:

N'y a-t-il pas un autre moyen d'arrêter une représentation théâtrale ou de changer un programme que d'opérer l'arrestation de six ou sept artistes venus de France sur la foi d'on ne sait quelles promesses.... et, qui ne connaissent pas notre mentalité? N'a-t-on pas l'habitude de faire aux artistes étrangers des réceptions civiques? Pourquoi les cellules aujourd'hui?"⁷³

The Quebec City liberal daily Le Soleil also condemned the police measures. Like Le Canada, Le Soleil expressed sympathy for the arrested French artists and embarrassment at their harsh treatment by Montreal Police authorities. In its view, the police raid was a monumental "gaffe."

D'après nous, il ne fallait pas arrêter les acteurs, mais interdire la pièce, tout simplement. Les acteurs, liés par contrat et interprétant ce qu'on leur faisait jouer, n'étaient pas les vrais responsables. Ils se trouvent ici nos hôtes..."⁷⁴

The police raid against Phi-Phi and its endorsement by Le Devoir also drew an angry reaction from the radical liberal weekly L'Autorité Nouvelle. Under the pseudonym

⁷³Le Canada, "En marge d'une arrestation," February 28, 1930, p.4.

⁷⁴Le Soleil, "Ce fut une gaffe," March 3, 1930, p.4.

"Flambeau," its director Gilbert Larue criticised the editorial staff of Le Devoir for inciting the police. Larue's editorial comment read, in part:

Il ne faudrait pourtant pas laisser le champ libre aux "fifis" du Devoir, qui, en fait de théâtre se constituent d'eux-mêmes espions, juges et censeurs. Ils s'envoient des messages téléphoniques et des lettres à la douzaine; ils décrètent d'autorité que d'agir selon leurs vues, à moins de recevoir l'excommunication du surpape Bourassa.⁷⁵

The sensational French-language daily La Patrie also took offence at the police repression. In a full-length editorial commentary, senior theatre critic and librettist Henri Letondal castigated municipal authorities for censoring Phi-Phi five days after its opening night performance. "Si personne n'avait écrit de lettre à l'administration municipale," Letondal scoffed, "la troupe aurait joué l'opérette de Christiné jusqu'à la fin de la semaine."⁷⁶ Letondal concluded his commentary with the recommendation that the responsibility of theatre censorship be transferred from "de simples policiers" to competent magistrates.⁷⁷

The opinion expressed in the liberal press against the police censorship of Phi-Phi precipitated violent counter-reaction from the Catholic press. As organs oriented to the orthodox views of the Roman Catholic Church, Le Devoir and L'Action Catholique staunchly opposed all avant-garde shows that promoted liberal influences. Both newspapers took exception to the Parisian operetta from a moral point of view. The editorial writers published in Le Devoir and L'Action Catholique expressed fears that the operetta's suggestive nature could stimulate local theatregoers into immoral behaviour. In

⁷⁵L'Autorité Nouvelle, "Les "fifis" du Devoir et le Phi-Phi du St.-Denis," March 2, 1930, p.1.

⁷⁶La Patrie, "Aurore, l'enfant martyr" ou le nouveau "Phi-Phi," March 8, 1930, p.20.

⁷⁷Ibid.

short, they opposed the decadent pernicious influences filtering into the province from postwar Paris.

Both Le Devoir and L'Action Catholique believed that the cast of Phi-Phi deserved the harsh police treatment. Of the two newspapers, L'Action Catholique was more extreme in its endorsement of the police raid. In a full-length editorial, Joseph Dandurand opined that the Parisian performers "ont eu le sort qu'ils méritaient."⁷⁸ According to Dandurand, the Montreal Police Department had rendered France and its artistic community a service by banning the scandalous production. In addition to condemning the Parisian artists, Dandurand blamed Joseph Cardinal, the proprietor of the Saint-Denis Theatre, for permitting the run of the controversial production. In the event of any future immoral shows, L'Action Catholique recommended a boycott of the house:

Quand les portes de son théâtre auront été fermées pendant une semaine, quinze jours, et au cas de récidivité pour une période encore plus prolongée, il perdra l'envie de chercher des recettes en offrant des représentations immorales. Mais voilà ce qu'on ne semble pas se résoudre à faire. Ce serait cependant le moyen le plus pratique d'attendre la fin recherchée, la propreté des représentations théâtrales.⁷⁹

Thus, the strongest opposition to foreign musical productions came from L'Action Catholique, the voice of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese in Quebec City.

In an effort to defend his record, Albert Gauvin sent Georges Pelletier of Le Devoir a second letter in which he pleaded innocence on behalf of the Parisian artists and himself.

⁷⁸L'Action Catholique, "La propreté au théâtre et l'aventure de "Phi-Phi," editorial, March 6, 1930, p.3.

⁷⁹Ibid.

and shifted the blame to the city's municipal officials.⁸⁰ According to Gauvin, Alphonse-Avila DesRoches, the President of the Executive Committee of the City of Montreal, informed Joseph Cardinal on Tuesday February 25, that he had received complaints about Phi-Phi from Le Devoir, but would forewarn Cardinal before taking any further action. "Au lieu d'un avertissement," Gauvin lamented, "ce fut l'arrestation!"⁸¹ Gauvin concluded his letter by requesting that DesRoches issue a public apology to the touring Parisian artists:

Au lieu de chercher à atténuer une erreur, que l'on fasse donc tout simplement des excuses publiques aux artistes. Ce serait beaucoup plus digne, beaucoup plus noble.⁸²

Alderman DesRoches was quick to respond to Albert Gauvin's arguments. In a declaration which was carried in most of the city's daily newspapers, the senior municipal official justified the use of the police force to censor Phi-Phi, and warned that his administration would tolerate no more unlawful or immoral touring theatre shows.⁸³ Albert Gauvin was particularly targeted:

Il devrait bien commencer par ne faire venir ici que des gens qui sont capables de respecter nos lois. Montreal n'est plus ce qu'il a déjà été et M. Gauvin ne nous empêchera certainement pas de faire notre devoir. Chaque fois que l'on nous donnera de l'immoralité dans les représentations théâtrales, nous ferons faire des arrestations.⁸⁴

⁸⁰Le Devoir, "M. Gauvin revient," letter, March 5, 1930, p.2.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³La Patrie, "Pas deux poids ni deux mesures, ici," March 6, 1930, p.3; Le Devoir, "M. DesRoches et M. Gauvin," March 6, 1930, p.3.

⁸⁴Le Devoir, "M. DesRoches et M. Gauvin," March 6, 1930, p.3.

The city's increasing hostility towards touring foreign productions appearing on the Montreal stage was further demonstrated when the American burlesque revue Jazz Time was censored by police at the Gayety Theatre. On the evening of Tuesday, March 11, 1930, less than one month after "L'Affaire Phi-Phi," Montreal police descended on the St. Catherine Street Gayety Theatre and arrested sixteen American performers on charges of participating in "an immoral production."⁸⁵ As in the case of the Parisian cast of Phi-Phi, the sixteen dancers were brought to police headquarters, and released on bail shortly thereafter.⁸⁶

"L'Affaire Phi-Phi" and the subsequent police raid on the Gayety Theatre resulted in the appointment of an official theatre censor. With the nomination of the veteran French-Canadian actor Jean-Paul Filion as municipal theatre censor in July 1930, the state gained a considerable degree of control over the Montreal stage.⁸⁷ Under the new censorship regulations, all local theatres had to submit their plays to Filion for approval before performing them.⁸⁸ Both traditional and musical productions were subject to this new censorship. In a La Presse interview, Filion promised to enhance the quality of Montreal's theatrical offerings. To achieve this goal, he promised to prohibit from the Montreal stage all productions "où la morale n'est respectée."⁸⁹

⁸⁵Le Devoir, "Arrestation de la troupe du Gayety," March 12, 1930, p.1; "Deux fonctionnaires témoignent dans la cause du Gayety," March 15, 1930, p.1.

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷La Presse, "Les théâtres sont prêts à observer la loi municipale," July 24, 1930, p.8.

⁸⁸Montreal Star, "New City Censor, J.L. Filion, States Policy," August 9, 1930, p.18.

⁸⁹La Patrie, "Il faut relever le niveau du théâtre," July 24, 1930, p.1.

In conclusion, the most powerful opponent of the Montreal stage in the postwar period remained the Roman Catholic Church, which viewed the modern theatre as another form of urban vice. The Church was particularly critical of foreign productions imported from New York and Paris, whose modern liberal influences it considered dangerous to its perception of the traditional French Canadian way of life. The Church's campaign against the operation of commercial amusements on Sundays intensified after the Laurier Palace Fire. This calamity, which occurred on Sunday, January 9, 1927, was fully exploited by the Catholic press in its campaign against the dangers of foreign recreational amusements. The Church's hostility towards recreational establishments contributed to the police repression against the Parisian cast of Phi-Phi in 1930.

The censorship of Phi-Phi marked an attempt by municipal officials to preserve what was considered to represent Quebec's long-standing conservative Catholic identity in the face of massive economic, social, and cultural changes. The police repression directed against La Compagnie Française d'Opérette de Paris clearly demonstrates the extent to which Municipal administrators were willing to go in order to shield Montrealers from what they perceived to be the pernicious influences of the modern theatre. In short, Phi-Phi marked the limit of the state's tolerance towards foreign cultural influences from both France and the United States.

The Parisian operetta Phi-Phi was barred from the Montreal stage because its libertine outlook conflicted with the contemporary conservative Catholic ideology of postwar Quebec. With its risqué and amoral treatment of sexual behaviour, Phi-Phi was condemned as an assault on the French-Canadian family, the very cornerstone of Quebec

society. The police censorship of the controversial operetta was an attempt by the state to counter the perceived widespread frivolity and decline of the moral order which accompanied the general prosperity of the postwar decade. The police censorship of the Montreal stage and the subsequent appointment of an official censor was intended as a warning to local theatre managers and touring companies of the dire consequences of disregarding Quebec's observance of a strict code of morality.

The extensive public debate which erupted following the banning of the Parisian operetta suggests that Quebec society was not integrated, but open to modern international influences. "L'Affaire Phi-Phi" reveals a society deeply polarised between those who embraced urbanisation and modernity, and those forces which favoured the old traditional Quebec based on religious and nationalist values.

CHAPTER FIVE:

THE DECLINE AND FALL OF BROADWAY NORTH

Despite its numerous and richly diverse musical theatre offerings, by 1929 the Montreal stage was beginning to show its deterioration under the mounting troubles plaguing the North American theatre industry. Beneath the glitter and glamour of Broadway and its northern satellite, very serious difficulties existed. In addition to the gradual decline of the touring roadshow system and theatre labour disputes, the advent of the sound motion picture, the onset of the Great Depression, and the emergence of local stock companies, all militated against the professional musical theatre of Montreal. Some examination is provided below of the impact of each of these factors on the success of musical theatre in the city. The conclusion is inescapable that just as in the case of its Broadway parent, the musical stage of Montreal was undermined by massive socio-economic changes entirely beyond its control.

The Decline of the Touring Roadshow System

As a northern satellite of Broadway, and Canada's leading gateway city for dozens of touring companies, Montreal was greatly affected by the gradual decline of the touring roadshow system. The number of plays on tour in the United States decreased from a record figure of 327 in 1904 to 88 twenty years later.¹ After its peak at the turn of the twentieth century, the practice of sending travelling troupes to exploit New York successes began to decline as a result of steadily mounting overheads in production and operating

¹ Alfred Bernheim, The Business of the Theatre: An Economic History of the American Theatre 1750-1932, (New York, Benjamin Blom 1932), p.75.

costs, and competition from silent movies. Theatre materials increased in price because of wartime inflation, union organisation, and post-war demands for reconstruction projects. After about 1912, there were sharply marked increases in the outlays for all items required for the production and operation of a musical play.² One study concludes that the expenses involved in staging a theatrical production increased by no less than 150% between 1913 and 1928.³ As a minor indicator, the costs of paint, crayons, canvas, lumber, and other materials required to produce backdrops, scenery and stage furniture for musical productions soared during this period. The modern settings required for a musical production during the 1920s ranged from \$15,000 to \$25,000.⁴ Whereas hundreds of dollars sufficed to mount a musical production at the turn of the century, thousands were required by the 1920s.

Higher theatre costs were also fuelled by the gains in standard wage-levels of organised labour. As theatre workers in both the United States and Canada began to organise into the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, they ultimately obtained better working conditions, which resulted in increased payroll outlays. Inspired by these gains, local theatre workers became increasingly militant in their relations with

²Alfred Bernheim, "The Evolution of the Legitimate Theatre in America," New York Times, March 25, 1928, X, p.2.

³Jack Poggi, Theatre In America: The Impact of Economic Forces 1870-1967, (New York, Cornell University Press, 1968), pp.36, 65-68; Alfred Bernheim, The Business of Theatre: An Economic History of the American Theatre 1750-1932, pp.138-148.

⁴Alfred Bernheim, The Business of the Theatre: An Economic History of the American Theatre 1750-1932, p.139.

theatre management, during a decade when union membership and labour radicalism in Canada waned.⁵

Labour Troubles

Labour troubles also contributed to the decline of the roadshow system and the popularity of Montreal's vibrant musical stage. As in New York, most theatre employees in Montreal were unionised, and included stage hands, musicians, and operators. Of these three divisions, the stagehands were particularly militant as the agitation during the 1925-1926 theatre season makes clear.

In September 1925, labour relations between theatre managers and the Montreal membership of the local branch of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees deteriorated over the contentious issue of wage scales. After the stagehands demanded a wage increase, the Montreal Theatre Managers' Association countered with a proposal for a 10% wage reduction. To avoid a lengthy deadlock, the Managers Association offered to forego their demand for a wage cut, if the employees did likewise with their demand for a wage increase. Their written offer to the theatre workers read, in part:

The Montreal Theatre Managers' Association asked for a 10% cut in your wage scale for the coming season and our reason for asking this was present conditions and the fact that a great many of the theatres are losing money, and but very few of them are making money. Most of them are wooing a good business but their overhead expenses are so heavy that they can not meet them and we honestly believe that we should reduce our operating expenses which was our reason for asking the 10% cut.⁶

After a week of intense negotiations, differences between the Association of Theatre

⁵Bryan Palmer, Working Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991, (Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 1992), Chapter 5.

⁶Montreal Standard, "Hope to Stop Theatre Strike," article, August 29, 1925, p.33.

Managers and the local stage hands were settled except at His Majesty's Theatre, which was particularly dependent on large stage crews for its elaborate stage productions. In August 1925, the management of His Majesty's invited its stagehands to accept a 10% wage cut. It based this request on the grounds that the playhouse had lost a total of \$45,000 during the previous two seasons, and could not continue to pay stage hand salaries of \$55.00 and \$60.00 a week.⁷ In a downright rejection of this request, the stagehands demanded instead a 10% wage increase.⁸

Despite last-hour negotiations, the management of His Majesty's and the stage hands were not able to reach a mutually satisfactory agreement, and the stage hands went on strike in late August 1925, carrying the musicians out with them. Faced with a mounting deficit, the theatre management maintained a firm stand and cancelled its season's bookings with the Shubert and Erlanger franchises, with whom it had signed a mutual booking contract in August 1924. On September 1, 1925, Bert Lang dispatched a telegram to the Shubert offices in New York City claiming:

"that owing to demands of musicians and stage hands we find it impossible to continue operation of His Majesty's Theatre under our lease from Sparrow Company." "

News of His Majesty's cancellation of the season's bookings was received with dismay by the Shubert Company, which interpreted the decision as an attempt to terminate

⁷Montreal Gazette, "Stage Hands Offered 5% Rise," September 3, 1925, p.6.

⁸Montreal Star, "Stage Hands Demand a 10% Increase: Theatres Are Opposed," August 27, 1925, p.6.

⁹Telegram from Bert Lang to Jules Murry, September 1, 1925, Shubert Archives, Montreal: His Majesty's Theatre.

its 1924 contractual agreement with the Montreal playhouse.¹⁰ This interpretation proved to be well grounded when Victor Mitchell, the President and chief financier of His Majesty's Theatre, dispatched a letter to the Shubert Company explaining the difficult circumstances under which he was forced to cancel his season's bookings. In a letter to Shubert Company Manager Jules Murry he lamented that:

Last season I and my friends raised \$25,000 for the purpose of financing His Majesty's Theatre, Montreal, Limited, the whole of which has been lost. I find it impossible to induce anybody to come forward and risk more money this season, and my own friends advised me that I would be very foolish to risk more money. I was, however, prepared to do this if the musicians and stagehands were reasonable, but as they were unreasonable I thought it better to cut my loss and drop out....

In the circumstances, however, I cannot take exception to the stand which you take, namely, that the agreement between His Majesty's Theatre, Montreal, Limited and you is terminated and come to an end.¹¹

The management of His Majesty's Theatre exploited the labour crisis to its best advantage. Bert Lang raised the necessary capital investment locally to ensure the rental of the theatre and the hiring of an ad hoc crew of stage hands for the presentation of the sensational musical production No, No, Nanette!.¹² The musical comedy was advertised in the local press as the only touring show to be staged at the playhouse for the entire 1925-

¹⁰"Special Delivery" letter to Victor Mitchell from Jules Murry, September 2, 1925. Shubert Archives, Montreal: His Majesty's Theatre.

¹¹Letter to Jules Murry, Manager, Sam S. Shubert Amusement Company from Victor Mitchell, September 9, 1925; Shubert Archives, Montreal: His Majesty's Theatre, #6000.

¹²Montreal Star, "No No Nanette With Cleo Mayfield and Cecil Lean at His Majesty's," September 3, 1925, p.6.

1926 season.¹³ This publicity campaign paid off handsomely. The opening night performance of the musical comedy attracted "a record audience" and an extra matinee performance was added later in the week.¹⁴

Following the successful tour of No, No, Nanette!, Lang exerted himself to replace the season's forced cancellations. In November, he secured the Dumbell revue Lucky 7 for one week as well as the De Feo Opera Company of New York for a single day's engagement. Although December brought Rose-Marie and another series of well-filled houses, His Majesty's Theatre did not re-establish a healthy business until a satisfactory entente was reached with its back-stage crews in the following season.

The Sound Motion Picture Industry

In addition to increased overheads, the competition for hegemony in the entertainment industry represented by the growing popularity of motion pictures also contributed to the decline of the roadshow system. It was no coincidence that the practice of sending touring companies on circuit experienced decline at the same time during which early motion pictures began to achieve commercial success.¹⁵

In North America, the first silent feature movies were released around 1912, and attracted a mainly working-class public, most of whom had never been to the theatre. As movies began to improve in quality and prestige, they began to lure many entertainment-

¹³ Montreal Star, "No No Nanette With Cleo Mayfield and Cecil Lean at His Majesty's," September 3, 1925, p.6; September 12, 1925, p.30.

¹⁴ Montreal Star, "No No Nanette" at His Majesty's Makes an Unmistakable Hit," review, September 15, 1925, p.6.

¹⁵ Jack Poggi, p.39

seekers away from live theatre.¹⁶ The addition of sound to the moving image in 1927 greatly accelerated this trend.

Montreal's first motion-picture house was built in 1906 and named the *Ouimetoscope* after its French-Canadian proprietor Ernest Ouimet.¹⁷ Thereafter, the number of picture houses in Montreal quickly multiplied. By 1922, the city was home to fifty-five cinemas of all sizes, including immense, luxurious picture palaces such as the Palace, the Loews, the Capitol, and the Imperial, that could accommodate spectators in the thousands.¹⁸ Montrealers quickly acquired the cinema-going habit, and by the mid-1920s, their daily attendance had risen to the level of some 50,000.¹⁹ It was therefore to be expected that in 1927, the American entertainment weekly *Variety* could describe Montreal as a "flourishing movie centre."²⁰

Unlike the city's lyric playhouses, movie theatres did not segregate their public into the stratifications of orchestra stalls, boxes, balcony, and gallery, which perpetuated the socio-economic divisions of the class system. With their much lower admission prices of twenty-five cents or less, motion pictures attracted a much wider audience. Their continuous presentation from mid-day until midnight allowed viewers to attend at any time of the day. In comparison to large-scale stage shows, whose production costs mounted

¹⁶Jack Poggi, pp.39-42.

¹⁷Peter Morris, *Embattled Shadows: A History of Canadian Cinema 1895-1939*, (Montreal, McGill-Queen's Press, 1978), pp.24-25.

¹⁸Robert Lahaise, *La fin d'un Québec traditionnel, 1914-1939*, (Montreal, L'Hexagone, 1994), p.86.

¹⁹*Montreal Herald*, August 29, 1925, p.9.

²⁰*Variety*, January 5, 1927.

steadily over the postwar decade, motion pictures were far less expensive to exhibit, and a single print could be projected an indefinite number of times, to multiple audiences. For example, during its two-week run at the Palace Theatre, "The Jazz Singer" was presented over eighty times. In his nostalgic reminiscences, the Canadian Dumbells star Al Plunkett remarked perceptively that "the reel with its words and music carried in that little tin box truly replaced us."²¹

The first sound film presented in Canada was released in Montreal in 1928. On September 1, 1928, Montrealers became the first Canadians to enjoy the new Vitaphone sound motion picture technology, which had been introduced in larger American centres just months before. The occasion was the Canadian première at the Palace Theatre of "The Street Angel," an all-talking dramatic feature.²² The film was an instant hit, and set a new record for attendance at a motion picture in Montreal. As many as 30,000 Montrealers viewed the film over the three-day Labour Day weekend.²³ "The talkies arrived in Montreal," the entertainment critic Frederick Edwards observed, "with all the accompanying indications of a whopping big triumph."²⁴

The technical innovation of synchronised sound on picture sounded the death-knell of large-scale musical theatre in Montreal. The Hollywood motion picture studios quickly realised the universal appeal of productions featuring dialogue, songs, orchestral

²¹ Al Plunkett, The Famous Dumbell, (New York, Pageant Press, 1956), p.81.

²² Montreal Herald, "Record Audiences Welcome "Talkies" to Palace Theatre," September 4, 1928, p.5.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

performances and choreography, and elevated the new format to the level of a genre.²⁵ By the end of the decade, almost every second Hollywood film was a musical.²⁶ A total of twenty-three movie musicals were produced by the major Hollywood studios in the year 1929 alone.²⁷ The heyday of the lavish Broadway musical was over.

The first movie musical to secure general theatrical release in Canada was "The Jazz Singer." Presented at Montreal's Palace Theatre in December 1928, this sound motion picture starred Al Jolson, who had dazzled Montreal audiences from the stage of the Princess Theatre only two years before, in the popular musical comedy Big Boy. In Montreal, as elsewhere, "The Jazz Singer" made moviegoers take notice. Shot on location in New York, the film's storyline about a cantor's son who breaks with family tradition to become a Broadway star was very appealing, and largely reflective of Jolson's own personal career. Its revolutionary new musical accompaniment enabled spectators to hear many of Jolson's original performances of hit numbers (extensively distributed as gramophone records) such as "Mammy" and "Toot, Toot, Tootsie," at far less cost than a live theatre performance. "The Jazz Singer" was an instant hit with the Montreal public, and remained at the Palace Theatre for a full two-week engagement, or over eighty performances.

Produced at a cost of \$500,000, the "Jazz Singer" grossed \$3,500,000 in less than five years, and transformed Warner Brothers from a struggling studio into a Hollywood

²⁵John Kobal, Gotta Sing Gotta Dance: A History of Movie Musicals (New York, Exeter, 1983), p.20.

²⁶John Kobal, p.23.

²⁷Ed Parish, The Great Hollywood Musical Pictures (London, Scarecrow Press, 1992), p.798

filmmaking giant.²⁸ Following the record-breaking box office profits of "The Jazz Singer," the general move by Hollywood studios towards musical films was rapid. By the end of the 1929-1930 season, the Palace, Capitol, Princess, and Orpheum Theatres had all installed state-of-the-art sound reproduction systems, and were presenting movie musicals. At least twenty musical films were presented at these four cinema houses over the course of the 1929-1930 season.²⁹ Among these twenty films were screen versions of Broadway shows previously staged live in Montreal. "Sally," "No No Nanette," and "The Vagabond King" all proved just as popular on the screen as the original stage productions which had played Montreal on repeated occasions in the 1920s.

The movie offerings of the Palace Theatre in the late 1920s clearly indicate the growing taste of Montreal audiences for the best in motion picture entertainment. For instance, in April 1929, the Palace Theatre presented "Broadway Melody," a screen version of the highly successful Broadway musical comedy of the same name. In addition to its notable Hollywood cast, the motion picture featured the largest female chorus of singers ever assembled for the screen.³⁰ Montreal was one of the first North American cities after Los Angeles and New York to secure a showing of this pioneer film. Like "The Jazz

²⁸Jay Nash & Stanley Ross, The Motion Picture Guide 1927-1983, (Chicago, Cinebooks, 1987), p.1450.

²⁹During the 1929-1930 season, the Palace Theatre presented the following musical films: "On With the Show," "The Hollywood Revue," "Gold-Diggers of Broadway," "Say it With Songs," "Rio Rita," "Sunny Side Up," "Sally," "No No Nanette," "Show of Shows," "The Vagabond King," "Rogue Song," "Paramount On Parade," "Mammy," and "The Desert Song." The Capitol Theatre featured: "Broadway Babies," "Words and Music," and "Dance of Life." The Princess Theatre presented: "Song of Love" and "Puttin' on the Ritz," while The Orpheum offered "Broadway Scandals."

³⁰Montreal Star, "Broadway Melody is a Complete Musical Comedy Presented on the Screen," March 23, 1929, p.28.

Singer" before it. "Broadway Melody" proved immensely popular with local audiences, and was held over at the Palace Theatre for three weeks.³¹ Produced at a cost of \$280,000, the Hollywood film grossed more than \$4,000,000, a huge profit, far surpassing that of any Broadway production.³²

Not all Montrealers welcomed the new sound motion pictures. The expansion of the film industry in the city was resisted by regular theatregoers accustomed to the presentation of live theatrical performances. During the Christmas holiday season of 1929, Samuel Morgan-Powell, the dramatic editor of the Montreal Star received a stinging letter from Fred Phillips, an ardent member of the theatregoing public, disturbed by the conversion of the city's playhouses into cinemas. His lengthy letter read, in part:

A little over a year ago my wife and I came to live in Montreal and we promptly became subscribers at the Orpheum, going there once a week and enjoying the performance immensely. Also we went to practically every show at His Majesty's and at the Princess, until it also turned "Talkie" like the Orpheum. And this week His Majesty's is dark, so there is not a single English-speaking theatre open in Montreal.³³

The poor theatre situation in Montreal at the end of the postwar decade was made even more evident in the following observations by Tom Kelley, the new manager of His Majesty's Theatre:

For Mr. Phillips' information as well as for that of the theatre-going public of Montreal, I wish to state that since the opening of His Majesty's this season, my company, the Consolidated Theatre Limited, had made every effort to bring as many shows as possible to Montreal. Unfortunately, however, due to the poor season and especially to poor patronage of the

³¹ Montreal Star, April 20, 1929, p.29.

³² John Kobal, p.31.

³³ Montreal Star, "Welcome Criticism," letter, December 21, 1929, p.26.

Montreal theatre-going public, several of the shows originally booked have flatly refused to come to Montreal.³⁴

Thus, theatre patronage in Montreal noticeably dropped with the advent of sound motion pictures.

By 1930, therefore, the sound motion picture had in one stride captured the popular market for entertainment across North America. In Montreal, as elsewhere, it became very difficult for musical productions to compete with this new form of entertainment based on machinery and technology. As the novelty of the sound film rapidly took over Montreal's entertainment scene, the city's musical stage was dealt a crippling blow. With their scenarios featuring more and more song-and-dance numbers, the talkies increasingly lured away greater and greater numbers of the musical theatre public. Although there are no reliable statistics to illustrate the degree to which the sound movies drew customers away from roadshows, the rapid expansion of the sound motion picture industry suggests this was so. In December 1929, Samuel Morgan-Powell noted alarmingly that "the movies are filling up while the legitimate theatres are starving to death."³⁵

During the second half of the 1928-1929 theatre season, the Princess, Orpheum, and Gayety Theatres were all acquired by the Consolidated Theatres Corporation, and transformed into sound motion picture houses.³⁶ The desire for increased profits through the exploitation of the new sound motion picture technology was the chief reason for the

³⁴Montreal Star, "The Theatre Situation," letter, December 28, 1929, p.24.

³⁵Montreal Star, "Cost of Entertainment," December 7, 1929, p.26.

³⁶Montreal Star, June 22, 1929.

conversion of these theatres into cinemas. Correspondence from the period, between Consolidated Theatres President Arthur Hirsch and Shubert Manager Jules Murry, reveals that the financial returns of the musical attractions staged at the Princess had been particularly poor for the theatre owners:

I note in going over the books of the Princess Theatre, that very few of the shows which you booked them have made the theatre any profit to speak of. I take for example, your dramatic shows, which have all lost money, and your musical shows, such as "Gay Paree" which grossed \$17,436 and made a net for the house of a little over \$600. Of course these conditions are impossible for a company like ours. I also note that in addition to this, you propose to add on a 5% booking fee. You can see that this would practically wipe out the little profit there is.³⁷

Accordingly, only His Majesty's Theatre, which was also purchased by the movie-theatre consortium for \$190,000, was maintained as Montreal's sole legitimate playhouse for first-class touring attractions.³⁸ The Saint-Denis Theatre continued to serve as a venue for both local theatre companies and Parisian troupes until its complete conversion into a French-language cinema in 1933.³⁹

The decline of Montreal's lively musical theatre life was further accentuated by the arrival of radio. The first radio broadcast in North America was made on May 20, 1920, at the Marconi radio station XWA (later CFCF) in Montreal, and thereafter, the number of

³⁷Letter to Jules Murry, Shubert Company from Arthur Hirsch, June 1, 1929, Shubert Archives, Montreal: Princess Theatre.

³⁸La Patrie, "Le His Majesty's à de nouveaux maitres," April 10, 1929, p.14; Variety, Montreal," April 17, 1929, p.76.

³⁹Hellmut Kallmann, Encyclopedia of Music In Canada, (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1992), p.835.

radio stations in Canada rapidly multiplied.⁴⁰ By 1923, there were over forty broadcasting stations operating across the Dominion.⁴¹ Many of these were owned as advertising outlets by commercial merchandising establishments eager to publicise their goods and services.

Throughout the 1920s, music predominated as an element in radio broadcast programming. At this time, musical broadcasts consisted of repetitions of classical works, popular tunes, and various forms of musical theatre productions. The operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan, Victor Herbert and Sigmund Romberg were particularly popular. In December 1925, for example, Gilbert and Sullivan's The Mikado was broadcast live on CNR Montreal.⁴² Two years later, in November 1927, CNR Montreal linked together with CNR Ottawa and CNR Quebec City to present Maritana, a three-act opera performed live by the CNR Ottawa Operatic Singers.⁴³

In addition to the classical operatic repertoire, modern jazz shows were also broadcast on Montreal radio. On Sunday August 28, 1927, a selection of jazz tunes from the touring American musical revue Mamie Smith and Her Gang was broadcast live on CHYC Northern Electric.⁴⁴ The world-famous American blues star was accompanied on

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Mary Vipond, Listening In: The First Decade of Canadian Broadcasting, 1922-1932 (Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), p.20.

⁴²Hellmut Kallmann, Encyclopedia of Music in Canada, p.117.

⁴³Mary Vipond, p.70.

⁴⁴Montreal Herald, "Mamie Smith To Broadcast Sunday Night," August 27, p.9.

the airwaves by the original Victor Record Jazz Hound Band and members of the Black Diamond Chorus.⁴⁵

With its ability to bring large-scale musical productions directly into the home, radio constituted a serious threat to live entertainment. Over the course of the postwar decade, Montreal radio audiences grew rapidly and "listening-in" became a popular communal family activity for thousands. Its varied and far more affordable musical entertainment kept many theatregoers at home, and thus further contributed to a decline in theatre attendance. As listening to the radio became a favourite pastime, a night at the theatre became less common. By 1937, more than half of all Canadian households owned a radio set, which rapidly became a fixture of daily life.⁴⁶

The Great Depression

The advent of the sound motion picture industry and radio, while harmful, were not solely responsible for the decline of Montreal's professional musical theatre. Far more devastating to the rich musical life of Montreal were the crippling financial effects of the Great Depression, which struck Broadway and its northern satellite with particular severity. The stock market crash of October 1929, and the economic dislocation that quickly followed, bankrupted many Broadway producers, including Arthur Hammerstein, Charles Dillingham and Florenz Ziegfeld.⁴⁷ As billions of dollars were lost on Wall Street, the capital required to produce plays grew increasingly scarce. Consequently, the number of

⁴⁵Montreal Herald, "At the Princess," August 27, 1927, p.8.

⁴⁶Mary Vipond, pp.100-105.

⁴⁷Gerald Bordman, American Musical Comedy: From Adonis to Dreamgirls (New York, Oxford University Press, 1982), p.136.

musical productions opening on Broadway dropped sharply. During the 1929-1930 Broadway season, the number of new musical shows fell to 32, the lowest figure since the First World War.⁴⁸ The number of musicals produced on Broadway continued to decline in the early 1930s, and never again returned to the heights attained during the booming 1920s.

The Great Depression struck Montreal with particular severity. During the first six months of 1930, construction activity in the city fell by 50%.⁴⁹ As the city's export commerce collapsed, thousands of jobs were eliminated. As the Depression deepened, unemployment became widespread. By 1933, 240,000 Montrealers were forced to turn to government relief for survival.⁵⁰

With the sudden collapse of the New York Stock Exchange in October 1929, the huge fortunes of many prominent Montrealers were lost almost overnight, leaving the city's social establishment in disarray.⁵¹ As in New York, the musical stage of Montreal was starved of the finances that guaranteed its health and prosperity in consequence of the overnight drying-up of funds from wealthy backers and patrons. Given the distressing socio-economic conditions in the city, theatre attendance also dropped significantly. As Montrealers lost the capacity to consume, many turned to the less expensive movies for their entertainment.

⁴⁸Gerald Bordman, American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1978), p.451.

⁴⁹Kathleen Jenkins, Montreal: Island City of the St. Lawrence, (New York, Doubleday & Co.), pp.473-474.

⁵⁰Robert Lahaise, La fin d'un Québec traditionnel, 1914-1939, p.131.

⁵¹Kathleen Jenkins, Montreal: Island City of the St. Lawrence, pp.472-474; Margaret Westley, Remembrance of Grandeur: The Anglo-Protestant Elite of Montreal 1900-1950 (Montreal, Libre Expression, 1990), p.240.

By the end of November 1929, in the wake of the Wall Street Crash, the leading entertainment weekly Variety reported that "the legitimate theatre scene in Montreal seemed doomed."⁵² The city's sole remaining playhouse, His Majesty's Theatre, remained dark for much of November, after two attractions booked for the playhouse "closed on the road."⁵³ The theatre's closure of its stage in the Autumn of 1929 was followed by heavy losses in early 1930.⁵⁴ Tom Kelley, the new manager of His Majesty's Theatre struggled to maintain his succession of first-class attractions in the face of growing competition from sound films, and rising unemployment. In order to secure the sensational new Sigmund Romberg operetta Nina Rosa, for a one-week engagement, Kelley had to offer the Shubert organisation "a tremendous guarantee."⁵⁵ Although Nina Rosa attracted large audiences to His Majesty's, the playhouse was still in debt again in February 1930 following the poor returns on the unsuccessful musical Robin Hood.⁵⁶ One year later, during the 1930-1931 season, the theatre critic Samuel Morgan-Powell lamented that "the present season has been so very disappointing and meagre in regard to production that there is very little to review."⁵⁷ Powell blamed the curtailment in the number of touring productions playing

⁵²Variety, November 20, 1929, p.71.

⁵³Montreal Herald, "His Majesty's Making Special Efforts To Secure Latest New York Successes," November 16, 1929, p.9. One of these attractions appears to have been the American Musical comedy Follow Through, which encountered success on Broadway in the Winter of 1929.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Montreal Star, "New Romberg Show Will Be Shown at His Majesty's December 30," December 14, 1929, p.25; "The Theatre Situation," letter, December 28, 1929, p.24.

⁵⁶Montreal Star, "Montreal," February 19, 1930, p.69

⁵⁷Montreal Star, "En Passant," January 3, 1931, p.20

Montreal on the recent Wall Street Crash and "the lack of sufficient theatres to assure financial success."⁵⁸

Although foreign musical attractions on tour continued to visit Montreal, they were far fewer in number. With the decline of activity on Broadway, the number of productions travelling north dropped off significantly. To fill the void left by the decline of the touring system, the management of His Majesty's Theatre welcomed the Société Canadienne d'Opérette and other local amateur companies.

The Resurgence of Stock Companies

The resurgence of local stock companies also accelerated the decline of Montreal's professional musical theatre. As the touring road show system declined, and the number of musical shows visiting Montreal diminished, local stock companies became increasingly more important. Unlike the foreign touring companies passing through Montreal, local troupes strove primarily for theatrical and artistic merit rather than commercial gain.

By far the most important musical stock company in postwar Montreal was the Société Canadienne d'Opérette. This operatic society was founded in 1921 by the Montreal baritone Honoré Vaillancourt and the musician Albert Roberval, to serve as a forum for local francophone artists. The semi-professional operatic company included sixty soloists, forty-six choristers, and an orchestra of twenty-five.⁵⁹

The Société Canadienne d'Opérette staged more than 300 productions over a period

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Dorith Cooper, "Opera in Montreal and Toronto: A Study of Performance Traditions and Repertoire, 1783-1980," (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Toronto, 1983), p.594.

of thirteen theatre seasons between 1921 and 1933.⁶⁰ Much of its repertoire consisted of classic French operettas such as Jacques Offenbach's Les Brigands or Planquette's Les Cloches de Corneville. The company also performed the operatic works of Donizetti, Massenet, Gounod and Franz Lehar.⁶¹ Most of these productions were staged at the Monument National on Boulevard Saint-Laurent.

Unlike the Parisian touring companies which appeared at the Saint-Denis Theatre, the Société Canadienne d'Opérette received strong support from the Province's traditional social elites. The religious hierarchy and governmental officials viewed the company as a bulwark against the pernicious influences of foreign touring shows, particularly those from the United States:

Au nombre des bienfaits que nous devons à la Société Canadienne d'Opérette, il faut placer en premier lieu la lutte contre l'envahissement du jazz et l'insignifiante et surtout tapageuse musique américaine, lutte coups de couplets bien français, si légers et toujours charmants qu'on aime entendre de nouveau fredonner. La Société Canadienne d'Opérette est donc une oeuvre méritoire, essentiellement educationnelle, une oeuvre que nous devons encourager de toutes façons, soit en devenant actionnaire de la compagnie, soit en assistant à chacune des splendides représentations qu'elle nous offre.⁶²

In addition to classic French repertoire, the Société also performed the operatic works of local artists. In November 1925, for instance, the company staged Le Roman de Suzon, a three-act operetta by the Montreal musician Henri Miro and the lyricist Henri

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Jean-Marc Larrue, Le Monument Inattendu: Le Monument National de Montréal 1893-1993, (Montreal, Éditions Hurtubise, 1993), p.222.

⁶²Jean-Marc Larrue, p.224; La Patrie, "La Bonne Lutte," November 3, 1924, p.18; L'Almanach de la langue française (1932) also praised the Société Canadienne d'Opérette.

Letondal.⁶³ This local effort was praised by the Montreal press. La Patrie described the production as "excellent," and praised the operatic company for encouraging the development of local talent.⁶⁴ In February 1929, the Société presented the Canadian opera L'Intendant Bigot by Joseph Voyer and Alfred Rousseau, which also received favourable reviews from the Montreal critics.

By 1931, the Société Canadienne d'Opérette was the most important vehicle for the expression of francophone theatre in Montreal. Besides its performances at the Monument National, the company's operatic repertoire was performed at His Majesty's Theatre, where it received enthusiastic responses from the city's anglophone community. On the day after its opening night performance of The Dollar Princess, the Montreal Star had nothing but praise for the production. According to the reviewer, "the audience was thoroughly appreciative of a highly commendable performance."⁶⁵ One month later, the Société closed the 1931-1932 season at His Majesty's Theatre with a French rendition of The Merry Widow. Once again, the company received very favourable reviews in the local press, especially from the Montreal Star. "So smooth was the presentation," wrote the Star reviewer, "that one hesitates in terming it "amateur" in any instance."⁶⁶

Following the sudden death of its indefatigable founder Honoré Vaillancourt in 1933, the operatic company quickly collapsed. Like most stock companies of the period,

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴La Patrie, "Les Premières," November 4, 1925, p.14.

⁶⁵Montreal Star, "La Société Canadienne d'Opérette Scores in "Princess Dollar," review, April 1, 1932, p.16.

⁶⁶Montreal Star, "La Veuve Joyeuse" is well Done by Société Canadienne d'Opérette," review, May 20, 1932, p.14.

the Société had revolved around the activities of its energetic founder. Although it never recovered from the death of Vaillancourt, most of its leading artists and soloists regrouped in a new operatic company called the Variétés Lyriques.

Founded in 1936 by Montreal artists Charles Goulet and Lionel Daunais, the Variétés Lyriques operatic stock company survived for many years without any government funding.⁶⁷ For eighteen theatre seasons between 1936 and 1955, the company presented mainly French and American operettas. Among its American offerings were many of the Broadway operettas originally brought to Montreal in the 1920s by the touring road companies.

One of the first productions staged by the Variétés Lyriques was the highly popular American operetta Rose-Marie. The staging of this large-scale production was an expensive undertaking for the company. In his autobiography (published posthumously in 1981), Charles Goulet recalled some of the costs required to stage the show:

Il y a d'abord \$100.00 pour la location du livret et de la partition, puis \$130.00 de droit d'auteur, plus \$100.00 de dépôt en garantie pour le retour du matériel en bon état.⁶⁸

Although somewhat steep for a stock company of the period, the investment proved worthwhile. The company's rendition of Rose-Marie opened on February 23, 1936 to favourable reviews. La Presse was especially enthusiastic and described the production as "un spectacle de luxe."⁶⁹

⁶⁷Charles Goulet, Sur la scène et dans la coulisse, (Québec, Ministère des affaires culturelles, 1981), p.122.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹La Presse, "Rose-Marie est un spectacle au point, vivement recommandé," February 24.

During the following 1937-1938 season, The Desert Song and No No Nanette were also produced by the company for the first time in French on the Continent. The enthusiastic reception given to these French adaptations of American works confirms the continued popularity of Broadway musicals among Montreal francophones. It suggests that the original New York productions staged in Montreal a decade before had left a lasting influence among local theatregoers.

In conclusion, the 1920s was the last successful decade for large-scale foreign musical theatre in Montreal. Despite an increase in the number of touring attractions staged in the city in the second half of the decade, the Montreal stage was gradually undermined by the declining roadshow system, labour disputes, the advent of musical films and radio, the Great Depression, and the resurgence of local stock. The musical stage of Montreal never again recovered the rich dynamism and diversity it attained in the 1920s.

The advent of the movie musical was particularly devastating for Broadway and its northern satellite. Between 1928 and 1930, the North American entertainment industry was completely transformed as dozens of Broadway musicals were translated into filmed versions. As the Hollywood motion picture studios added song and dance numbers to their movies, they began attracting increasing numbers of musical theatregoers. By the end of the decade, Montrealers were able to see film versions of many of the Broadway productions which had previously toured the city. The sound musical film had replaced in Montreal, the elaborate and expensive live stage version of lyric theatre.

CONCLUSION

This study of the musical theatre of Montreal between August 1920 and the end of the 1929 season represents a contribution to the ongoing research tracing the historical influence of the United States upon Quebec society. A close analysis of the diverse musical attractions appearing on the Montreal stage reveals the growing cultural penetration of the United States into the metropolis after the First World War. Throughout the 1920s, the musical stage of Montreal acted as a satellite of Broadway and was inextricably linked to its sources of supply in New York. In this last successful decade of large-scale touring companies, professional musical theatre was staged mainly at His Majesty's, the Princess and the Saint-Denis Theatres by international roadshow companies, usually after a successful run in New York. With the exception of sixteen Canadian revues presented by the Dumbells troupe, the Montreal musical stage in the period under examination was predominantly American in character and dominated by touring roadshows directed northwards to extend their profitable New York presentations. To the theatre managers behind these touring attractions Montreal represented a lucrative northern extension of the American theatrical circuit.

Throughout the 1920s, the infrastructure of New York theatre was essential to the very existence of professional musical theatre in Montreal. The city's geographical proximity to New York helped to ensure it a constant supply of high-quality musical attractions. While local musical theatre companies were few in number and unable to

guarantee a steady flow of productions, the musical attractions sent from Broadway greatly enhanced the city's cultural life and were a popular divertissement for a large proportion of Montrealers from all social classes and linguistic backgrounds.

This northern extension of Broadway into Montreal made the city an active and flourishing centre of musical theatre activity. Out-of-town touring companies offered Montreal audiences a rich diversity of musical theatre fare. During the ten consecutive theatre seasons from August 1920 to June 1930, a total of 1799 performances featuring 368 operettas, operas, musical comedies and revues were staged at His Majesty's, the Princess, and the Saint-Denis Theatres. This abundance and rich variety of musical activity helps to explain why Montrealers felt they were living in the entertainment capital of Canada, even if it represented nothing more than a northern satellite of Broadway.

Many of these attractions were runs of successful Broadway operettas, musical comedies and revues, as well as classical grand operas staged by the New York-based San Carlo Opera Company. The number and variety of American musical productions appearing on the Montreal stage increased significantly in the second half of the decade, as the output of musical productions peaked on Broadway, and the Princess Theatre became available for the touring roadshows of the Shubert organisation after March 1926. As Broadway flourished in the late 1920s, its Montreal satellite received some of the most popular musical attractions and their stars appearing on the New York stage. For instance, during the course of the 1926-1927 theatre season, Montreal audiences were entertained by Al Jolson in Big

Boy, Sacha Guitry and Yvonne Printemps in Mozart and Beatrice Lillie in Oh, Please! In the subsequent 1927-1928 theatre season, Montreal theatregoers were offered Rose-Marie in October, the world premiere of Rudolf Friml's The White Eagle in November, the musical comedy Happy in December, the popular Gershwin musical comedy Oh Kay! in January, The Vagabond King in February, Blossom Time in March, and both the 7th edition of the George White Scandals and the 20th edition of the Ziegfeld Follies in April.

This privileged theatrical relationship with Broadway also enabled Montrealers occasionally to view and evaluate musical productions before their début in New York. Like New York audiences, Montreal's theatregoing public was cosmopolitan and sophisticated, and receptive to the latest musical trends Broadway had to offer. Over the course of the decade, a total of seven musicals were sent to Montreal for tryout engagements. The enthusiastic reception given to these touring attractions by both the city's anglophone and francophone communities is an indication that Montreal society in the 1920s was receptive to modern foreign cultural influences, particularly from the United States.

Montreal was also indirectly dependent on New York for most of its European musical fare. New York served as a magnet in luring the casts of European productions to North America, who were unwilling to cross the Atlantic to perform solely in Canada, without the added incentive of a lucrative Broadway run. Whether French, British, or Russian, most of the musical attractions appearing on the Montreal stage were channelled through New York, the theatrical capital of the Western world at that time. For instance, the

Troupe d'Opérette de Paris, the Modern Musical Comedy Company of Paris, and the French musical Mozart all came to Montreal following successful tours of Broadway. Likewise, the highly popular British revues Chu Chin Chow, Charlot's Revue and This Year of Grace were also brought to Montreal via New York.

In its musical theatre, then, Montreal in the 1920s reflected Quebec's growing economic and cultural alignment with the United States. From 1922 onwards, the United States replaced Great Britain as Canada's leading trading partner and source of capital investment.¹ After trade and investment, Yvan Lamonde reminds us, "culture constituted the strongest bond between Quebec and the United States."² The increasing integration of the Canadian economy with that of its powerful neighbour to the South inevitably brought about a similar rapprochement in the cultural scene. As capital investment from the United States in Quebec flourished in the second half of the decade, the musical stage of Montreal became increasingly American in tone. It was no mere coincidence that more than one half of Montreal's American lyric repertoire was presented between September 1925 and June 1930. In addition to American motion pictures, radio programmes and magazines, the musical attractions staged in Montreal constituted another expression of what John Thompson has

¹C.P. Stacey, Canada and the Age of Conflict, Volume 2, (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1981), p.16; Yvan Lamonde, "Le regard sur les États-Unis: le révélateur d'un clivage social dans la culture nationale québécoise," Journal of Canadian Studies, Vol.30 No.1 (Spring 1995), p.73.

²Yvan Lamonde, "American Cultural Influence in Quebec: A One- Way Mirror," p. 107, in Alfred Hero & Marcel Daneau, (eds.) Problems and Opportunities in U.S.-Quebec Relations, (London, Westview Press, 1984).

aptly described as "the northbound tidal wave" of American culture that washed over Canada in the interwar years.³ In short, the musical shows arriving from Broadway were another element in the popular culture imported from the United States.

This study also highlights the various genres of musical theatre presented on the Montreal stage after the First World War. As Mireille Barrière, has pointed out, from the earliest years of the century, operetta constituted the most popular form of musical presentation in the city. Its romantic settings and sentimental melodies appealed to a wide spectrum of Montreal society. Operetta was performed at all three of the city's playhouses by American, French and British touring roadshow companies.

After operetta, grand opera represented the greatest proportion of Montreal's postwar lyric repertoire in terms of total number of titles offered. Although it was the preferred genre of the wealthier elements of Montreal society, it also attracted a cross-section of the city's middle- and working-class communities. Grand Opera was staged mostly at the Saint-Denis Theatre by French, American, and Russian touring companies.

Musical comedy, especially from the United States, was another well-favoured facet of Montreal's musical theatre life. Unlike the older musical forms of opera and operetta, its novel choreography and musical scores reflecting the fast-paced jazz idiom appealed largely

³John H. Thompson, Canada 1922-1939: Decades of Discord (Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 1985), p.175.

to the younger generation, across linguistic and cultural lines. The musical comedies appearing in Montreal were staged by mainly American and French roadshow companies at either His Majesty's or the Princess Theatres.

The musical stage of Montreal in the 1920s was also enlivened by the more episodic variety of the musical revue. Although the revue ranked lowest in terms of total number of titles, it constituted the second most frequently performed musical genre in the city after operetta. As in the case of musical comedy, the majority of revues presented in the city was American in origin, and was restricted to the city's English-language playhouses. Their lavish décors and high-stepping chorus-lines appealed mainly to middle-class male patrons.

The rich diversity of the musical theatre of Montreal did not find universal favour. The city's openness and cultural omnivorousness towards foreign cultural expression greatly alarmed the province's clerical and nationalist elites and their following, who favoured the traditional image of Quebec with its established adherence to religious and patriotic values. This small and powerful minority of ecclesiastics, intellectuals, teachers, and journalists exercised considerable ideological and political influence. Like previous generations, they were alarmed by the intense economic, social and cultural changes brought about in the 1920s, and feared for the loss of their traditional influence and privileged status in an increasingly modern, materialistic and secular world. In short, these elites intended to maintain their well-entrenched control over the climate of public opinion in the province.

During the postwar ferment of the "roaring twenties," these ecclesiastic and nationalist pressure groups saw themselves as moral guardians of the social order, and sought to keep Montrealers Catholic, francophone and isolated from the intrusion of commercialised popular culture. In their eyes, the theatre was another example of urban vice. In these years, Montreal's lyric playhouses were located with other recreational establishments in the city's downtown core, which was perceived as a regrettable centre of amoral materialism and conspicuous consumption. The city's leading French-language playhouse, the Saint-Denis Theatre, operated on Sundays, to the displeasure of sabbatarians who maintained that those days should be devoted exclusively to religious observances.

The liberal outlook propagated by light-hearted musicals was diametrically opposed to the long-standing Catholic traditions of French Quebec. American musical theatre was particularly deplored because it was presented in English, and its popular appeal attracted Montrealers from diverse linguistic and religious backgrounds. Successful Broadway entertainers such as Al Jolson were part of a new entertainment medium, which cut across linguistic and religious barriers and united Montreal audiences from all cultural backgrounds in a shared experience of agreeable relaxation and enjoyment. Local Church and nationalist leaders abhorred the idea of Catholic francophone Montrealers participating in American recreational activities alongside anglophone Protestant and Jewish Montrealers. In whatever form it was presented, whether stage productions or films, entertainment of American origin was considered to incorporate extraneous values and influences harmful to traditional French Canadian society.

Contemporary musicals from postwar Paris were equally denounced by Quebec's ecclesiastical and nationalist leadership. Some, such as the controversial French operetta Phi-Phi contained references to sexual promiscuity and adultery, which were deemed morally dangerous to the survival of the French Canadian family. More perhaps than any other theatrical presentation, Phi-Phi reflected the libertine spirit common to postwar Paris and New York, which conflicted with Quebec's traditional Catholic identity. The censorship of Phi-Phi, the police raids on the Gayety Theatre and the subsequent appointment of a Municipal theatre censor, are evidence of the seriousness with which the influence of the theatre on public morality was viewed. These repressive actions endorsed by clerical and nationalist leaders marked the beginnings of a more conservative and authoritarian social order in Quebec during the 1930s.

The censorship of Phi-Phi did not go unchallenged, however. The strong condemnation of the censorship of Phi-Phi published in the liberal press suggests that Quebec society was not monolithic and integrated, but an open society tolerant of, and receptive to, modern international influences. A careful analysis of the extensive public debate that followed the arbitrary police banning illustrates how the battle lines were drawn in Montreal, not along purely linguistic or cultural lines, but according to differences of outlook on Quebec's evolving cultural identity. "L'Affaire Phi-Phi" heightened the deep societal struggle in process within francophone Quebec between liberal forces who embraced industrial progress and cultural change and the province's conservative clerical and

nationalist elites and their followers, who favoured the religious and nationalist values of traditional Quebec. While a proportion of Montreal businessmen, academics, journalists, artists, and other avant-garde professionals welcomed foreign cultural contacts, the clerical-nationalist intelligentsia of the city abhorred extraneous commercial recreation, and favoured leisure pastimes that conformed to Quebec's Catholic and French heritage. In short, the lines of cleavage in Montreal in the interwar years followed the general demarcations of western society itself: avant-garde liberalism versus conservative nationalism.

The timing of the clerical nationalist backlash against the modern liberal influences of the Montreal stage came too late to be effective. By 1930, the Montreal stage was in the doldrums. Phi-Phi and another French operetta, Ciboulette, were the only two musical productions staged at the Saint-Denis Theatre in the 1929-1930 season. As a northern outpost of Broadway, Montreal was directly affected by the mounting troubles plaguing the North American theatre industry. Once again, it was important developments in the entertainment industry of the United States that determined the fate of the musical stage in Montreal. In addition to the gradual decline of the roadshow system and intensive local labour disputes, the advent of American sound films proved particularly devastating.

The long-awaited technical achievement of combining photographic images with synchronised sound became a reality in 1927. This innovation greatly weakened live musical theatre. As the Hollywood motion picture studios discovered the universal appeal of musical productions, they quickly added song-and-dance numbers to their films, and elevated the

new format to the level of a self-contained genre. Between 1927 and 1930, Hollywood released forty lavish and expensive musicals, with which the legitimate theatre could hardly compete.⁴ Most of these were film adaptations of successful Broadway musicals. Many of them such as "Little Jessie James," "Sally," "No, No, Nanette!," "The Vagabond King," and "The New Moon" were film versions of Broadway productions that had toured Montreal, just years before. For instance, less than two years after his successful tour of Montreal in the musical comedy Big Boy, the Broadway star Al Jolson reappeared before Montreal audiences in December 1928 on the screen of the Palace Theatre in "The Jazz Singer."

From December 1928 onwards, Montrealers could enjoy lavish musical productions and their stars on screen at far less cost than theatre seats. By 1930, the music-loving public in Montreal had transferred its allegiance to the less expensive and more widely available musical film. In Montreal, as elsewhere on the continent, the cinema had triumphed over live musical theatre entertainment.

⁴Ed Parish, The Great Hollywood Musical Pictures (London, Scarecrow Press, 1992), p.799.

APPENDIX I

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE - 1920-1921 SEASON

PRODUCTION	GENRE	ORIGIN	DATE	PERFORMANCES
Chu Chin Chow	Revue	G.B.	Aug. 16-28	16
Sinbad	Revue	U.S.A.	Aug.30-Sept.4	8
Take It From Me	M C	U.S.A.	Sept. 6-11	9
Aida	Opera	U.S.A.	Sept. 13	1
Rigoletto	Opera	U.S.A.	Sept. 14	1
Romeo & Juliet	Opera	U.S.A.	Sept. 15(m)	1
Forza del Destino	Opera	U.S.A.	Sept. 15	1
Carmen	Opera	U.S.A.	Sept. 16	1
La Bohème	Opera	U.S.A.	Sept. 17	1
Madame Butterfly	Opera	U.S.A.	Sept. 18(m)	1
Il Trovatore	Opera	U.S.A.	Sept. 18	1
Maid of Mountains	Operetta	G.B.	Oct. 4-16	16
M. Beaucaire	Operetta	G.B.	Oct. 18-23	8
Biff! Bing! Bang!	Revue	CANADA	Nov. 22-27	8
Camouflage	Revue	CANADA	Dec. 7-26	25
Linger Longer Letty	M C	U.S.A.	Dec.27-Jan. 1	8
Maytime	Operetta	U.S.A.	Jan. 10-15	8
Maid of Mountains	Operetta	G.B.	Feb. 1-5	7
Beggar's Opera	Opera	G.B.	Feb. 21-26	8
Irene	M C	U.S.A.	May 2-7	8

MC denotes Musical Comedy; (m) denotes matinee performance

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE - 1921-1922 SEASON

PRODUCTION	GENRE	ORIGIN	DATE	PERFORMANCES
Blue Pierrots	M C	U.S.A.	Sept. 5-10	8
Passing Show (1921)	Revue	U.S.A.	Oct. 24-29	8
Hullo Canada	Revue	G.B.	Nov. 14-26	16
Sir Harry Lauder	Revue	G.B.	Nov. 28-30	5
Biff! Bing! Bang!	Revue	CANADA	Dec. 26-31	9
Merry Widow	Operetta	U.S.A.	Feb.27-March 4	8
Beggar's Opera	Opera	G.B.	March 27-Apr. 1	8
Dumbells Revue (1922)	Revue	CANADA	Apr.24-29	8
And Very Nice Too*	M C	U.S.A.	May 8-13	8
Hello Canada (2nd ed)	Revue	G.B.	May 15-20	8

MC denotes Musical Comedy; * denotes pre-Broadway tryout production

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE - 1922-1923 SEASON

PRODUCTION	GENRE	ORIGIN	DATE	PERFORMANCES
Carmen	Opera	U.S.A.	Sept. 25	1
Aida	Opera	U.S.A.	Sept. 26/Oct. 7	2
Rigoletto	Opera	U.S.A.	Sept. 27	1
Tosca	Opera	U.S.A.	Sept. 28	1
Faust	Opera	U.S.A.	Sept. 29/Oct. 6	2
Madame Butterfly	Opera	U.S.A.	Sept. 30/Oct. 3	2
La Bohème	Opera	U.S.A.	Oct. 2	1
Il Trovatore	Opera	U.S.A.	Oct. 4	1
La Traviata	Opera	U.S.A.	Oct. 5	1
Cavalleria Rusticana	Opera	U.S.A.	Oct. 7	1
Blossom Time	Operetta	U.S.A.	Oct. 16-21	8
Irene	M C	U.S.A.	Oct. 23-28	8
Chu Chin Chow	Revue	G.B.	Oct. 30-Nov. 4	8
Dumbells Revue (1922)	Revue	CANADA	Nov. 6-11	9
Marjolaine	M C	U.S.A.	Nov. 13-18	8
Prince Charming Jr	Revue	U.S.A.	Nov. 20-25	8
The Mikado	Operetta	U.S.A.	Dec. 11-13	6
H.M.S. Pinafore	Operetta	U.S.A.	Dec. 14-17	4
Iolanthe	Operetta	U.S.A.	Dec. 18-19	3
Pirates of Penzance	Operetta	U.S.A.	Dec. 20-21	3
Blossom Time	Operetta	U.S.A.	Feb. 5-10	8
Full O' Pep	Revue	CANADA	Feb. 19-24	8
Carry On	Revue	CANADA	Apr. 2-7	8
Molly Darling	M C	U.S.A.	Apr. 23-27	8
Spice of 1922	Revue	U.S.A.	May 14-19	8

MC denotes Musical Comedy

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE - 1923-1924 SEASON

PRODUCTION	GENRE	ORIGIN	DATE	PERFORMANCES
Gingham Girl	M C	U.S.A.	Dec. 3-8	8
Maid of Mountains	Operetta	G.B.	Dec. 17-22	8
Chauve-Souris	Revue	RUSSIA	March 10-22	18

MC denotes Musical Comedy

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE - 1924-1925 SEASON

PRODUCTION	GENRE	ORIGIN	DATE	PERFORMANCES
Shuffle Along	Revue	U.S.A.	Sept. 15-20	8
Passing Show (1923)	Revue	U.S.A.	Sept. 29-Oct. 4	8
Blossom Time	Operetta	U.S.A.	Oct. 27-Nov. 1	8
Ace High	Revue	CANADA	Nov. 10-15	9
Charlot's Revue	Revue	G.B.	Nov. 24-29	8
Artists & Models	Revue	U.S.A.	Jan. 26-31	8
Little Jessie James	MC	U.S.A.	Feb. 2-7	8
Sitting Pretty	MC	U.S.A.	March 9-14	8
Greenwich Village				
Follies (5th ed.)	Revue	U.S.A.	March 30-Apr. 4	8
Carmen	Opera	U.S.A.	March 31(m)	1
Rose-Marie	Operetta	U.S.A.	Apr. 6-11	8
Chauve-Souris	Revue	RUSSIA	Apr. 20-25	8
Oh Yes!	Revue	CANADA	May 4-9	8

MC denotes Musical Comedy; (m) denotes matinee performance

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE - 1925-1926 SEASON

PRODUCTION	GENRE	ORIGIN	DATE	PERFORMANCES
No No Nanette	MC	U.S.A.	Sept. 14-19	9
Lucky 7	Revue	CANADA	Nov. 9-14	8
Samson & Dalila	Opera	U.S.A.	Nov. 15(m)	1
Werther	Opera	U.S.A.	Nov. 15	1
Rose-Marie	Operetta	U.S.A.	Dec. 1-6	8
The Mikado	Operetta	U.S.A.	Jan. 11-17	8
Three Little Maids	MC	G.B.	Jan. 19-23	8
Boris Goudonoff	Opera	RUSSIA	Feb. 22, 24	2
Demon	Opera	RUSSIA	Feb. 23	1
No No Nanette	MC	U.S.A.	Apr. 19-24	8
Three Bags Full	Revue	CANADA	Apr. 26-May 1	8

MC denotes Musical Comedy; (m) denotes matinee performance

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE - 1926-1927 SEASON

PRODUCTION	GENRE	ORIGIN	DATE	PERFORMANCES
Tip Toes	MC	U.S.A.	Nov. 1-6	8
Shuffle Along	Revue	U.S.A.	Nov. 14-20	9
The Mikado	Operetta	G.B.	Jan. 4-6	5
H.M.S. Pinafore	Operetta	G.B.	Jan. 7-9	3
Yeoman of the Guard	Operetta	G.B.	Jan. 10-12	4
The Gondoliers	Operetta	G.B.	Jan. 13-15	4
The Gondoliers	Operetta	G.B.	May 9-11	4
H.M.S. Pinafore	Operetta	G.B.	May 12-14	4
Yeoman of the Guard	Operetta	G.B.	May 16-18	4
The Mikado	Operetta	G.B.	May 19-20	3
Oh, Please	MC	U.S.A.	May 30-June 4	8

MC denotes Musical Comedy

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE - 1927-1928 SEASON

PRODUCTION	GENRE	ORIGIN	DATE	PERFORMANCES
Happy *	MC	U.S.A.	Nov. 28-Dec. 3	8
Allez-Oop!	Revue	U.S.A.	Dec. 5-10	8
Aida	Opera	U.S.A.	Jan. 9	1
Faust	Opera	U.S.A.	Jan. 10, 14(m)	2
Rigoletto	Opera	U.S.A.	Jan. 11, 14(m)	2
Il Trovatore	Opera	U.S.A.	Jan. 11	1
Cavalleria Rusticana	Opera	U.S.A.	Jan. 12	1
Carmen	Opera	U.S.A.	Jan. 13	1
Sir Harry Lauder	Revue	G.B.	March 19-21	5
Ziegfeld Follies				
(20th ed.)	Revue	U.S.A.	April 2-7	8
Hit the Deck	MC	U.S.A.	April 23-28	8
Earl Carroll Vanities	Revue	U.S.A.	May 14-19	8
Wildflower	MC	U.S.A.	May 21-26	9
Lady Be Good	MC	U.S.A.	May 28-June 2	8
Good Morning Dearie	MC	U.S.A.	June 4-9	8
No No Nanette!	MC	U.S.A.	June 11-16	8
The Red Mill	MC	U.S.A.	June 18-23	8
Oh Boy	MC	U.S.A.	June 25-30	8
Little Nellie Kelly	MC	U.S.A.	July 2-7	8
Sally	MC	U.S.A.	July 9-14	8
Queen High	MC	U.S.A.	July 16-21	8
Very Good Eddie	MC	U.S.A.	July 23-28	8
Up She Goes	MC	U.S.A.	July 30-Aug. 4	8
Tip Toes	MC	U.S.A.	Aug. 6-11	8

MC denotes Musical Comedy; * denotes pre-Broadway try-out production; (m) denotes matinee performance

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE - 1928-1929 SEASON

PRODUCTION	GENRE	ORIGIN	DATE	PERFORMANCES
Bits & Pieces	Revue	G.B.	Sept. 3-8	8
The Mikado	Operetta	G.B.	Sept.17-19/Oct.6	6
Iolanthe	Operetta	G.B.	Sept.20-22/Oct.4-5	6
Ruddigore	Operetta	G.B.	Sept. 24-26	4
Pirates of Penzance	Operetta	G.B.	Sept. 27-29	4
Trial By Jury	Operetta	G.B.	Sept. 27-29	4
Patience	Operetta	G.B.	Oct. 1-3	4
Between Ourselves **	Revue	G.B.	Nov. 24-29	8
Carmen	Opera	U.S.A.	Dec. 3-5	2
Tales of Hoffman	Opera	U.S.A.	Dec. 4	1
Il Travatore	Opera	U.S.A.	Dec. 5	1
Beggar's Opera	Opera	G.B.	April 8-13	7
Polly	Opera	G.B.	April 13(m)	1
Ta Bouche	M C	FRANCE	April 15-18	5
The Gondoliers	Operetta	G.B.	April 29-30/May 1	3
Trial By Jury	Operetta	G.B.	May 1-2	2
Pirates of Penzance	Operetta	G.B.	May 1-2	2
The Mikado	Operetta	G.B.	May 2-3	3
Rio Rita	M C	U.S.A.	May 6-11	8
Blackbirds	Revue	U.S.A.	May 13-18	8
This Year of Grace	Revue	G.B.	May 27-June 1	8

MC denotes Musical Comedy; **denotes pre-London tryout production;
 (m) denotes matinee performance

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE - 1929-1930 SEASON

PRODUCTION	GENRE	ORIGIN	DATE	PERFORMANCES
Student Prince	Operetta	U.S.A.	Sept.30-Oct. 5	8
Chauve-Souris	Revue	RUSSIA	Oct. 7-12	8
Come Eleven	Revue	CANADA	Nov. 11-16	9
Carmen	Opera	U.S.A.	Dec. 9, 14	2
Faust	Opera	U.S.A.	Dec. 10, 14	2
Martha	Opera	U.S.A.	Dec. 11(m)	1
Madame Butterfly	Opera	U.S.A.	Dec. 12	1
Yolanda of Cyprus	Opera	U.S.A.	Dec. 13	1
Marriage of Figaro	Opera	U.S.A.	Dec. 14(m)	1
Nina Rosa*	Operetta	U.S.A.	Dec. 30-Jan. 4	8
Paganini	Operetta	FRANCE	Jan. 20-22	4
Dédé	M C	FRANCE	Jan. 23-25	4
M. Beaucaire	Operetta	FRANCE	Feb. 3-5	4
Passionément	M C	FRANCE	Feb. 6-8	4
Robin Hood	Operetta	U.S.A.	Feb. 10-15	8
Sir Harry Lauder	Revue	G.B.	March 6-8	5
Blossom Time	Operetta	U.S.A.	March 10-15	8
New Moon	Operetta	U.S.A.	March 24-29	8
Aida	Opera	U.S.A.	March 31	1
La Traviata	Opera	U.S.A.	April 1	1
Rigoletto	Opera	U.S.A.	April 2(m)	1
Forza Del Destino	Opera	U.S.A.	April 2	1
Carmen	Opera	U.S.A.	April 3	1
Barbier de Seville	Opera	U.S.A.	April 4	1
Il Trovatore	Opera	U.S.A.	April 5(m)	1
Cavalleria Rusticana	Opera	U.S.A.	April 5	1
Naughty Marietta	Operetta	U.S.A.	April 7-12	8
Bitter Sweet	Operetta	G.B.	April 21-26	8
Sari	Operetta	U.S.A.	April 28-May 3	8

MC denotes Musical Comedy: *denotes pre-Broadway tryout production:
(m) denotes matinee performance

THE PRINCESS THEATRE - 1925-1926 SEASON

PRODUCTION	GENRE	ORIGIN	DATE	PERFORMANCES
Student Prince	Operetta	U.S.A.	March 8-20	16
Blossom Time	Operetta	U.S.A.	March 22-27	8
Artists & Models	Revue	U.S.A.	April 5-10	8
Rose-Marie	Operetta	U.S.A.	April 12-17	8
Daughter of Rosie O'Grady *	M C	U.S.A.	April 19-24	8

MC denotes Musical Comedy: * denotes pre-Broadway tryout production

THE PRINCESS THEATRE - 1926-1927 SEASON

PRODUCTION	GENRE	ORIGIN	DATE	PERFORMANCES
La Bohème	Opera	U.S.A.	Aug. 30	1
Aida	Opera	U.S.A.	Aug. 31	1
Lucia Di Lammermoor	Opera	U.S.A.	Sept. 1(m)	1
Carmen	Opera	U.S.A.	Sept. 1	1
La Tosca	Opera	U.S.A.	Sept. 2	1
Cavalleria Rusticana	Opera	U.S.A.	Sept. 3	1
Faust	Opera	U.S.A.	Sept. 4(m)	1
Il Trovatore	Opera	U.S.A.	Sept. 4	1
Rose-Marie	Operetta	U.S.A.	Sept. 27-Oct. 2	8
Student Prince	Operetta	U.S.A.	Oct. 4-9	8
Blossom Time	Operetta	U.S.A.	Nov. 8-13	8
Joy Bombs	Revue	CANADA	Nov. 15-20	8
Kid Boots	M C	U.S.A.	Nov. 29-Dec. 4	8
Rose-Marie	Operetta	U.S.A.	Dec. 27-Jan. 1	8
Big Boy	M C	U.S.A.	Jan. 31-Feb. 5	8
Mozart	M C	FRANCE	Feb. 7-12	8
Katja	Operetta	U.S.A.	Feb. 14-19	8
Sir Harry Lauder	Revue	G.B.	April 7-9	5
Student Prince	Operetta	U.S.A.	April 18-23	8
George White's Scandals (7th ed.)	Revue	U.S.A.	May 2-7	8

MC denotes Musical Comedy: (m) denotes matinee performance

PRINCESS THEATRE - 1927-1928 SEASON

PRODUCTION	GENRE	ORIGIN	DATE	PERFORMANCES
Mamie Smith & Her Gang	Revue	U.S.A.	Aug. 29-Sept. 3	8
Vagabond King	Operetta	U.S.A.	Oct. 3-8	8
Rose-Marie	Operetta	U.S.A.	Oct. 10-15	8
Oo La La	Revue	CANADA	Nov. 14-19	8
The White Eagle ⁺	Operetta	U.S.A.	Nov. 21-26	8
Oh Johnny [*]	M C	U.S.A.	Dec. 12-17	8
Desert Song	Operetta	U.S.A.	Jan. 16-21	8
Oh Kay	M C	U.S.A.	Jan. 23-28	8
My Maryland	Operetta	U.S.A.	Feb. 13-18	8
Desert Song	Operetta	U.S.A.	Feb. 20-25	8
Vagabond King	Operetta	U.S.A.	Feb. 27-March 4	8
Gay Paree (2nd ed.)	Revue	U.S.A.	March 12-17	8
Blossom Time	Operetta	U.S.A.	March 19-24	8
George White's Scandals (7th ed.)	Revue	U.S.A.	April 9-14	8
Yours Truly	M C	U.S.A.	April 16-21	8
Bubbling Over	Revue	CANADA	May 7-12	8
Chauve-Souris	Revue	RUSSIA	May 14-19	8

MC denotes Musical Comedy: * denotes pre-Broadway tryout production

PRINCESS THEATRE - 1928-1929 SEASON

PRODUCTION	GENRE	ORIGIN	DATE	PERFORMANCES
Rose-Marie	Operetta	U.S.A.	Sept. 3-8	8
Good News	M C	U.S.A.	Sept. 10-15	8
La Fille du Tambour Major	Operetta	FRANCE	Sept. 23-24	2
La Mascotte	Operetta	FRANCE	Sept. 24-25	2
Les Saltimbanques	Operetta	FRANCE	Sept. 26-27	3
Les Mousquetaires au Couvent	Operetta	FRANCE	Sept. 28-29	3
My Maryland	Operetta	U.S.A.	Oct. 15-20	8
Why Worry	Revue	CANADA	Nov. 5-10	8
Un Bon Garçon	M C	FRANCE	Jan. 14-16, 19	5
Passionément	M C	FRANCE	Jan. 16-18	4
Compte Obligado	M C	FRANCE	Jan. 21-23, 26	5
Yes	M C	FRANCE	Jan. 23-25	4
Faust	Opera	U.S.A.	Jan. 28/Feb. 2(m)	2
Madame Butterfly	Opera	U.S.A.	Jan. 29	1
Carmen	Opera	U.S.A.	Jan. 30/Feb. 2	2
Marriage of Figaro	Opera	U.S.A.	Jan. 30	1
Pagliacci	Opera	U.S.A.	Jan. 31	1
Martha	Opera	U.S.A.	Feb. 1	1
Trois Jeunes Filles aux Folies Bergère	M C	FRANCE	Feb. 4-6, 9-10	6
Rêve de Valse	Operetta	FRANCE	Feb. 6-8	4
Blossom Time	Operetta	U.S.A.	Feb. 18-23	8
Par Sur la Bouche	M C	FRANCE	Feb. 25-28	6
Passionément	M C	FRANCE	March 1-2(m)	2
Trois Jeunes Filles aux Folies Bergère	M C	FRANCE	March 2	1
Desert Song	Operetta	U.S.A.	March 4-9	8
Lovely Lady	M C	U.S.A.	April 1-6	8
Rain or Shine	M C	U.S.A.	April 15-20	8
Gay Paree (3rd ed)*	Revue	U.S.A.	April 22-27	8
Sunny	M C	U.S.A.	April 29-May 4	8
Hit the Deck	M C	U.S.A.	May 6-11	8
Five O'Clock Girl	M C	U.S.A.	May 13-18	8
Mr. Battling Butter	M C	U.S.A.	May 20-25	8
No No Nanette!	M C	U.S.A.	May 27-June 1	8

MC denotes Musical Comedy; *denotes pre-Broadway tryout production:
(m) denotes matinee performance

SAINT-DENIS THEATRE 1920-1921 SEASON

PRODUCTION	GENRE	ORIGIN	DATE	PERFORMANCES
Aida	Opera	U.S.A.	Sept. 29	1
Faust	Opera	U.S.A.	Sept. 30(m)	1
Rigoletto	Opera	U.S.A.	Sept. 30/Oct. 2	2
Carmen	Opera	U.S.A.	Oct. 1	1
Lucia	Opera	U.S.A.	Oct. 2(m)	1
La Tosca	Opera	U.S.A.	Oct. 28	1
La Bohème	Opera	U.S.A.	Oct. 29	1
Madame Butterfly	Opera	U.S.A.	Oct. 30(m)	1
Il Trovatore	Opera	U.S.A.	Oct. 30	1

(m) denotes matinee performance

SAINT-DENIS THEATRE 1921-1922 SEASON

PRODUCTION	GENRE	ORIGIN	DATE	PERFORMANCES
La Tosca	Opera	U.S.A.	Oct. 31	1
La Bohème	Opera	U.S.A.	Nov. 1(m)	1
Carmen	Opera	U.S.A.	Nov. 1	1
Madame Butterfly	Opera	U.S.A.	Nov. 2	1
Lohengrin	Opera	U.S.A.	Nov. 3	1
Faust	Opera	U.S.A.	Nov. 4	1
Thais	Opera	U.S.A.	Nov. 5(m)	1
Il Trovatore	Opera	U.S.A.	Nov. 5	1

(m) denotes matinee performance

SAINT-DENIS THEATRE 1922-1923 SEASON

PRODUCTION	GENRE	ORIGIN	DATE	PERFORMANCES
Aida	Opera	U.S.A.	Oct. 23	1
Madame Butterfly	Opera	U.S.A.	Oct. 24,28	2
Il Trovatore	Opera	U.S.A.	Oct. 25	1
La Tosca	Opera	U.S.A.	Oct. 25	1
Faust	Opera	U.S.A.	Oct. 26	1
Lohengrin	Opera	U.S.A.	Oct. 27	1
Carmen	Opera	U.S.A.	Oct. 28(m)	1
Boris Goudonoff	Opera	RUSSIA	Nov. 13,18(m)	2
Pique-Dame	Opera	RUSSIA	Nov. 14	1
Le Démon	Opera	RUSSIA	Nov. 15(m), 23	2
La Juive	Opera	RUSSIA	Nov. 15	1
La Fiancée du Tsar	Opera	RUSSIA	Nov. 16	1
La Fée des Neiges	Opera	RUSSIA	Nov. 17,22,25	3
Eugene Onegin	Opera	RUSSIA	Nov. 18	1
La Veille de Noël	Opera	RUSSIA	Nov. 20	1
Rigoletto	Opera	RUSSIA	Nov. 21	1
Faust	Opera	RUSSIA	Nov. 22	1
Une Nuit d'Amour	Opera	RUSSIA	Nov. 23,25	2
La Fille de Mme. Angot	Operetta	FRANCE	Jan. 15,17, 25(m)/ Feb. 13	4
La Mascotte	Operetta	FRANCE	Jan. 16,18(m),21	3
Le Petit Duc	Operetta	FRANCE	Jan. 18,20,23/ Feb. 20(m)	4
Veronique	Operetta	FRANCE	Jan. 19-20(m)	2
Les Cloches de Corneville	Operetta	FRANCE	Jan. 22,24/Feb.14	3
La Fille du Tambour Major	Operetta	FRANCE	Jan. 25,27/Feb.11	3
Le Grand Mogol	Operetta	FRANCE	Jan. 26,27/Feb.10	3
Les Mousquetaires au Couvent	Operetta	FRANCE	Feb. 9, 12	2
Le Démon	Opera	RUSSIA	April 9, 22(m)	2
Carmen	Opera	RUSSIA	April 10, 20	2
Faust	Opera	RUSSIA	April 11(m),21(m)	2
Nuit d'Amour	Opera	RUSSIA	April 11, 15	2
La Juive	Opera	RUSSIA	April 13, 21	2
La Fée des Neiges	Opera	RUSSIA	April 14(m), 18	2
Pique-Dame	Opera	RUSSIA	April 14	1
Boris Goudonoff	Opera	RUSSIA	April 15(m), 19	2
Eugene Onegin	Opera	RUSSIA	April 16	1
La Veille de Noël	Opera	RUSSIA	April 17	1
La Fiancée du Tsar	Opera	RUSSIA	April 22	1

(m) denotes matinee performance

SAINT-DENIS THEATRE - 1926-1927 SEASON

PRODUCTION	GENRE	ORIGIN	DATE	PERFORMANCES
La Mascotte	Operetta	FRANCE	Jan. 9-12	5
Giroflé Girofla	Operetta	FRANCE	Jan. 13-15	4
Cloches de Corneville	Operetta	FRANCE	Jan. 16-19	5
La Périhole	Operetta	FRANCE	Jan. 20-22	4
La Fille de				
Mme. Angot	Operetta	FRANCE	Jan. 23-26	5
La Mascotte	Operetta	FRANCE	Jan. 27-29	4
Mademoiselle				
Nitouche	Operetta	FRANCE	Jan. 30-Feb.2	5
Giroflé Girofla	Operetta	FRANCE	Feb. 3	2
La Périhole	Operetta	FRANCE	Feb. 4	1
Cloches de Corneville	Operetta	FRANCE	Feb. 5	1
Les Mousquetaires				
au Couvent	Operetta	FRANCE	Feb. 6-9	5
Le Petit Duc	Operetta	FRANCE	Feb. 10-12	4
Cloches de Corneville	Operetta	FRANCE	Feb. 13	2
La Mascotte	Operetta	FRANCE	Feb. 14	1
Les Mousquetaires				
au Couvent	Operetta	FRANCE	Feb. 15-17	2
Le Grand Mogol	Operetta	FRANCE	Feb. 17-19	4

(m) denotes matinee performance

SAINT-DENIS THEATRE 1927-1928 SEASON

PRODUCTION	GENRE	ORIGIN	DATE	PERFORMANCES
Gillette de Narbonne La Fille du	Operetta	FRANCE	Nov. 20-22	5
Tambour Major Joséphine Vue	Operetta	FRANCE	Nov. 23-26	5
par ses Soeurs	Operetta	FRANCE	Nov. 27-29	5
Boccace	Operetta	FRANCE	Nov. 30-Dec.3	5
Miss Helyett	Operetta	FRANCE	Dec. 4-6	5
Rip	Operetta	FRANCE	Dec. 7-10	5
La Petite Mariée	Operetta	FRANCE	Dec. 11-13	5
Les Mousquetaires au Couvent	Operetta	FRANCE	Dec. 14-17	5
La Fille du Tambour Major	Operetta	FRANCE	Dec. 18-20	5
La Belle Hélène	Operetta	FRANCE	Dec. 21-24	5
Gillette de Narbonne	Operetta	FRANCE	Dec. 25-27	5
Les 28 Jours de Clairette	Operetta	FRANCE	Dec. 28-31	5
Cloches de Corneville	Operetta	FRANCE	Jan. 2-7	10
Les Saltimbanques	Operetta	FRANCE	Jan. 9-14	10
La Bayadère	Operetta	FRANCE	Jan. 15-17	5
Le Grand Mogol	Operetta	FRANCE	Jan. 18-21	5
La Mascotte	Operetta	FRANCE	Jan. 22-24	5
La Cocarde de Mimi Pinson	Operetta	FRANCE	Jan. 25-28	5
Les Saltimbanques	Operetta	FRANCE	Jan. 29-30	3
Les Mousquetaires au Couvent	Operetta	FRANCE	Jan. 31	2
La Cocarde de Mimi Pinson	Operetta	FRANCE	Feb. 1-3	4
Miss Helyett	Operetta	FRANCE	Feb. 4	2

SAINT-DENIS THEATRE 1928-1929 SEASON

PRODUCTION	GENRE	ORIGIN	DATE	PERFORMANCES
La Veuve Joyeuse	Operetta	FRANCE	Oct. 7-9,11,13	8
Manon	Opera	FRANCE	Oct. 10,12	2
La Périchole	Operetta	FRANCE	Oct. 14-16,18,20	7
Faust	Opera	FRANCE	Oct. 17,19	2
Le Jour et la Nuit	Operetta	FRANCE	Oct. 21-23,25,27	7
Mireille	Opera	FRANCE	Oct. 24,26,28	3
Le Coeur et la Main	Operetta	FRANCE	Oct. 28, 30-31	4
Lakmé	Opera	FRANCE	Oct. 29,31/Nov.1-3	5
Surcouf	Opera	FRANCE	Nov. 4,6,8	4
La Traviata	Opera	FRANCE	Nov. 5,7,9-11	6
Cloches de Corneville	Operetta	FRANCE	Nov. 11,13,15,17	5
Werther	Opera	FRANCE	Nov. 12,14-16	4
La Petite Mariée	Operetta	FRANCE	Nov. 18,20,22,24	5
Herodiade	Opera	FRANCE	Nov. 19,21-23,25	5
Le Barbier de Seville	Opera	FRANCE	Nov. 26,28-30	4
Le Petit Duc	Operetta	FRANCE	Nov. 27,29/Dec.1	4
Carmen	Opera	FRANCE	Dec. 3,5-7,9	5
La Mascotte	Operetta	FRANCE	Dec. 2,4,6,8	5
Carmen	Opera	FRANCE	Dec. 9	1
Faust	Opera	FRANCE	Dec. 9,14	2
Manon	Opera	FRANCE	Dec. 11,15	2
La Petite Mariée	Operetta	FRANCE	Dec. 11	1
La Traviata	Opera	FRANCE	Dec. 12,15	2
Surcouf	Opera	FRANCE	Dec. 13(m)	1
Cloches de Corneville	Operetta	FRANCE	Dec. 13	1
La Cocarde de				
Mimi Pinson	Operetta	FRANCE	Dec. 16-18	5
Si J'étais Roi	Operetta	FRANCE	Dec. 19-22	5
Dragons de Villars	Operetta	FRANCE	Dec. 23-25	5
Mignon	Opera	FRANCE	Dec. 26-29	5
Les Mousquetaires				
au Couvent	Opera	FRANCE	Dec. 30-Jan.1	4
Les Saltimbanques	Operetta	FRANCE	Jan. 2-5	5
Dolly	Operetta	FRANCE	Jan. 6-10	7

(m) denotes matinee performance

SAINT-DENIS THEATRE - 1929-1930 SEASON

PRODUCTION	GENRE	ORIGIN	DATE	PERFORMANCES
Ciboulette	Operetta	FRANCE	Feb. 15-21	10
Phi-Phi	Operetta	FRANCE	Feb. 22-26	5

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