

Les Belles Soeurs a mic



Doris Friolet, Eve-Marie, Adele Fontaine and Nicole Bolster

osm of Quebecois society

Les Belles Soeurs

By Michel Tremblay

Le Theatre Francais d'Edmonton

Through May 25

By CHARLES BOLSTER

Les Belles Soeurs (literally *The Sisters-In-Law*) was written in 1965 at the height of a 'revolution tranquille' which has finally been recognized as the troubled conscience of a distinct people — the Quebecois.

In a deceptively simple plot, 14 women gather at another's house to paste a million trading stamps in booklets, and spend two acts cursing the injustices of lower-class life. Hardly, one would think, a suitable framework for political symbolism and high drama.

However, the searing political overtones and dramatic quality of *Les Belles Soeurs* underline its placement as one of the finest plays in Canada's thin theatre canon. The author has never hesitated describing both these aspects of his work with intense pride.

"I think it's stupid," Tremblay told me in 1969, "to go on a stage and say 'We have to separate.' If we just demonstrate how different we are, it will be clear that things must change."

Referring to *Les Belles Soeurs* in particular, he went on:

The people of my country, Quebec, have always been a fringe of society in North America; when I wrote of the 15 underprivileged women in 'Les Belles Soeurs', I wrote, unwittingly, a political play. The microcosm of the frustrated women naturally suggests the greater macrocosm — Quebec.

Tremblay also insisted that he cared little about 'plot', and much about 'the characterization of an idea.' Profoundly influenced by the Chorus of Greek tragedy, he

often allows the sisters-in-law to punctuate the play with unified curses against the 'maudite vie' they must live. Another splendid device to emphasize each character's frustration is the monologue, spoken with the rest of the cast in a beautifully choreographed 'freeze.'

Following a policy of rich development, director Pierre Bokor distributed the 15 roles among experienced, and totally inexperienced actresses. The overall performance was superb. Quite simply each actress gave a definitive portrayal of Tremblay's individual 'members of a fringe society.'

Adele Fontaine's Germaine Lauzon (hostess of the stamp-pasting party) appeared as the 'Quebec mother' in the province's low socio-economic strata; Eve Marie's Rose Ouimet emerged as the very essence of a frustrated housewife, and her searing monologue was supreme theatre.

Rounding out the middle-aged group in splendid portrayals of individual torment were Doris Friolet (Gabrielle Jodoin — the pitifully plain woman); Nicole Bolster (Lisette De Courval — the ridiculous pretender); Christiane Poirier (Yvette Longpre — the good woman of so little importance); Christiane Spenard (Des-Neiges Verrette — the wasted spinster); Therese Dallaire (Therese Dubuc — the mother-caring martyr); Claudette Richard (Angeline Sauve — the repentant sinner); Irene Blum (Rheana Bibeau — the pious shell), and Jacinthe Comeau (Pierrette Guerin — the prostrate prostitute). Paulette Desaulniers, Christiane Blondeau, and Angele Aubin produced a brilliant contrast as the younger generation, and Anne Mansfield was a poignant 90-year-old dribbling down her Coke.

Although director Bokor obviously stressed the liberty of each performer's interpretation, his masterful touch was particularly evident in avoiding extremes of hysteria and depression.

The curtain falls on a superlative season.

Bravo, Theatre Francais d'Edmonton. A la prochaine.