

Life-span of Little Theatre uncommonly long

By MAGGIE HANNAH
Herald staff writer

Seven years is said to be the average life-span of a little theatre group but Georgetown Little Theatre has passed the mark three times over and is still going strong.

Team spirit is the key to that success according to Hon. Hill, long time member of GLT and director of the group's first offering of the season, *There Goes The Bride*, opening tonight in Sacre Coeur Hall at 8 p.m.

"The normal life span of a little theatre group is seven years," he says. "In that time if politics or petty jealousies don't get you atrophy sets in unless the group can be regenerated with new members. We deal with very different personalities and yet when a play is in progress a team spirit seems to be engendered and everyone pulls together. We have no star egos such as I've seen disrupt other groups."

Mr. Hill said the group aims for a professional standard even though its members are amateurs and the consistency with which GLT festival entries get nominated for awards would seem to indicate that the group is achieving a fairly high standard.

GLT resulted from a group of night school students who took a drama course at Georgetown District High School and produced a play called the *Mayor of Toronto* and enjoyed it so much they decided to stick together and form a little theatre group. Of the original dozen or so members only three still remain with GLT, Gord Hunt, Mary Goebel and Vera MacDonald.

Their first production, Mrs. MacDonald says, was a melodrama, *Dirty Work* at the Crossroads. It was put on in 1960 at the high school.

"It was great fun to do," Mrs. MacDonald recalled, "although I don't know if I'd have enjoyed it as much as a member of the audience."

In the early days Mrs. MacDonald said the size of the audience depended on how hard the GLT members worked to sell the tickets. Friday and Saturday performances usually attracted fair crowds but weeknights weren't so popular.

"But you have to remember there were only 3,000 people in town when I came here in 1952," she said, "so you were looking at a whole different situation to draw on in the beginning."

HIGH STANDARD
Mrs. MacDonald feels that on a first try must say something about the group's standards.

Mrs. MacDonald won the group's only acting award around 1965 when she took a best actress award for her part in *Oh Dad, Poor Dad*.

Mr. Hill says the group switched to the Central Ontario group about five or six years after they began competing because the competition was too hot in Western.

"We were up against groups like Toronto in Central," he said, "but they just weren't as organized as the ones in Western. Places like London and Hamilton had very good groups, highly organized and GLT always aimed for a fairly high standard. When they first entered a drama festival in the early 1960s they were in the

Western Ontario Drama League with places like London, Hamilton and Burlington for competition. They were one of 12 entries and yet won a place among the five finalists in the competition and pulled in an award for the best visual presentation. Results like that almost professional even though they were only amateur groups. I guess that's why they can have professional groups today as well as little theatre groups. I don't know why we ever switched. It was a lot of fun in Western."

Mrs. MacDonald gives a lot of credit for the success of their productions to the backstage people. While actors get their satisfaction from the audience reaction the backstage people don't.

"The audience never knows the hours and real labour that goes into producing the sets and so on," she said, "I don't know why they do it. It must be the challenge or providing the background to create the atmosphere that enables us to bring the play off. I really don't know what brings some of them back year after year, but they come."

GLT YEARS
In all the years GLT has been running Mrs. MacDonald says there is only once that a production had to be cancelled. Although there are never any understudies because they never have enough appropriate people to permit such a luxury, *Spring and Port Wine* was the only play that never made it. Pat and Derek Joynes had to make an emergency trip to England the week the play was due to open because of illness in Mr. Joynes' family and the show had to be cancelled. That was about five years ago.

Patriek Smith, an outside director of the group had hired for the show, stepped into the breach and performed a one-man show which he had done on previous occasions and already knew well enough to get through on short notice.

A play reading committee of three examines plays put forward annually and decides which ones merit closer inspection from the group before a final choice is made.

Mrs. MacDonald says that among the issues to be contemplated in choosing a play are the number and type of actors and sets needed, the number of scenes, costumes, and how large a stage will be required for the production.

"If there were three scenes, for instance, we probably couldn't handle it," she says. "Or if we needed 20 characters you know immediately it isn't worth a second look. Or if there was a crowd scene, you have to look at whether the stage is big enough to handle it. You also need a good balance of male and female roles. Something that required 10 men and a couple of women would probably be beyond us."

PLAY CHOSEN
A play may be chosen even though the group lacks an actor for a particular part, Mrs. MacDonald said, because it is assumed the person they need will be found by the time casting is begun.

If no one in the group can be found to fill a role Mr. Hill said, then the call will go out to neighboring little theatre groups for a volunteer to help out. Since GLT has a pretty good reputation it is easier to

get help from outside groups than it would be if they weren't aiming for a high standard.

Increasing the membership so that directors have a wider range of people from whom to choose when they are casting plays is one of the improvements Mr. Joynes sees in GLT's future. Getting a new theatre which will provide a good setting for the group's work will help to attract more and better people he feels, and Mr. Hill agreed.

Membership has had its ups and downs over the years, Mr. Hill said. During the early 1960s there seemed to be a sudden interest in little theatre and the group had a good

membership. Suddenly, with the advent of colored television members couldn't be found.

The year they did the Noel Coward play as their festival entry the adjudicator made a comment about not being able to understand why anyone would do something like this.

"The fellow obviously didn't look around and see there were only about a dozen members in the group at the time," he said. "With about six actors you have to go with something that only uses four people."

SEVEN PEOPLE
When they staged *Bonaventura* there was one night they only had seven people in the

audience "and four of them were usherettes," Mr. Hill laughed.

About five years ago membership began an upswing that is still going on. At present the group has about 50 members. They are fairly evenly divided between actors and backstage people. It makes no difference to the group whether new members have great experience or just lots of willingness to learn. Anyone is welcome who is willing to work at some aspect of theatre.

One of the things one notices about the group is the number of British people who belong to it. Mr. Hill says that this is not

by design, it has just worked out that way. Little theatre has a strong tradition in Britain and this may influence British people to join up when they find a place where they can get involved.

"I know people ask why we don't do more Canadian or American plays," he said, "but it comes down to being able to cast them. When you have mostly British actors you look at British plays. Yet when you do mainly British plays Canadians tend to feel hesitant about joining us. It's a vicious circle."

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Finding out that father is running around with another woman is not the best news a bride can hear, especially just before her wedding. Melissa Bell, the bride in Georgetown Little Theatre's production of *There Goes The Bride*, sheds a few tears much to the amazement of her father, Bev Nicholas and the

amusement of the other woman, Tiffany Hamilton. The comedy will be staged in Sacre Coeur Hall on Oct. 12, 13, 19 and 20. There will also be a special benefit performance on Wednesday, Oct. 10 with the proceeds to go to Halton's Women's Place. Curtain time each night is 8 p.m.

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