

With Sean Mulcahy

More great summer theatre

by Shirley Whittington
Theatre in Barrie this summer is in the hands of a volatile Irish-Canadian who wears an unusual medal around his neck.

On one side is a head of St. Gennadius, the only Christian martyr who was an actor. There's a head of David on the other.

The medal represents luck, theatrical triumph and sentiment (it was given to him by Robert Goulet, an old friend). Mulcahy is surrounded with an aura of luck, sentiment and triumph, and that exuberance has rubbed off on the Gryphon Theatre.

This summer is Mulcahy's third with Gryphon and already things are looking rosy with soaring subscription sales and a lighthearted theatrical menu.

Harvey, by Mary Chase, Ah, Wilderness, by Eugene O'Neill; A Thousand Clowns, by Herb Gardner; The Moon is Blue, by F. Hugh Herbert and The Prisoner of Second Avenue by Neil Simon.

"This summer's fare has been chosen as a tribute to the American bi-centennial," says Mulcahy, adding, "in Barrie, I want to do good solid middle-of-the-road theatre. I don't want to upset anybody."

He wrinkles his brow quizzically. "Although the word 'virgin' in The Moon is Blue may have to be explained to some of our youngsters!"

Mulcahy is an uncompromising professional who admits that his private life is wildly disorganized. "I can't even make myself stop smoking. But when I'm working, I'm as disciplined as a guard-sman. And I demand this from those who work with me."

He flips a cigarette out of an elegant case, and attends to it with a heavy,

expensive lighter. "I tell my people if they can't do a totally professional job, I'll fire them and take over the role myself. And I have done this."

He leans forward intently, eyes blazing. "Give me a play, and I will ring the welkin." The welkin has rung frequently for Mulcahy. He came to Canada from Ireland to break into television. Within three months he had leading dramatic roles. "It was the right place for me," he says. "I've never looked back."

With Andrew Allan, he was Associate Director of the Shaw Festival for three years. He frequently adapts his favourite writers for television and radio performances. He has taught drama at universities in Toronto and London and at the Banff School of Fine Arts.

For five years, he was Artistic Director of Edmonton's Citadel Theatre. He has directed productions in Montreal, Sudbury, St. Catharines, Toronto and of course, Barrie.

He has just come from playing GBS in Dear Liar. ("It was the hit of the season and a joy to do.")

Coming to Barrie each summer is, says Mulcahy, "Rather like taking one's hols with good pay. I love what I do here."

This year, in addition to his active participation in theatre, he's planning to run for ACTRA council. He's determined to do something about the practice of engaging foreign actors for Canadian dramas.

The CBC is the villain in the piece, according to Mulcahy. "They are obsessed with profit making," he says, "and they think they have to use names from across the border to do it. The public wants it because they've been given it. It's the old colonial syndrome

"If he's so good, what's he doing here?" During his five years with Edmonton's Citadel Theatre, he went out of the country only once for performers.

Mulcahy seems to thrive on challenge. He's just come from Brock University, apparently for the last time. "I cannot face another six months on that campus," he says. "It's badly administered, from lack of parking to dirty crockery to bad food and the general feeling that all artists are faggots."

He made headlines when he left the Citadel. He was, in fact, fired. "I suppose I got bored, and began looking for trouble. The theatre was a flamboyant success — full for all performances. But you know, it's very dangerous to fall prey to the security of a weekly pay check. I'm not married, so I don't need security. All I have is my clothes, and my cassettes."

Cassettes? Another Mulcahy passion surfaces. "I love music. Have you never heard of the Mulcahy Musical Map of Southern Ontario? You can drive from Oakville to Toronto with one Mozart Divertimento. Barrie to Toronto will use up the Eroica, and perhaps the Egmont Overture as well. Collingwood to Toronto takes Beethoven's Ninth

if Von Karajan conducts..." In fact, Mulcahy would like to conduct opera. "The Canadian Opera Company desperately needs some fresh air. I hope they'll soon realize that I've had some experience in opera. How I'd love to do Der Rosenkavalier."

A perverse twinkle leaps into his eyes. "What do you think of the idea of a collection of Stephen Leacock's funniest writing to be staged some summer not in Orillia, but here in Barrie?"

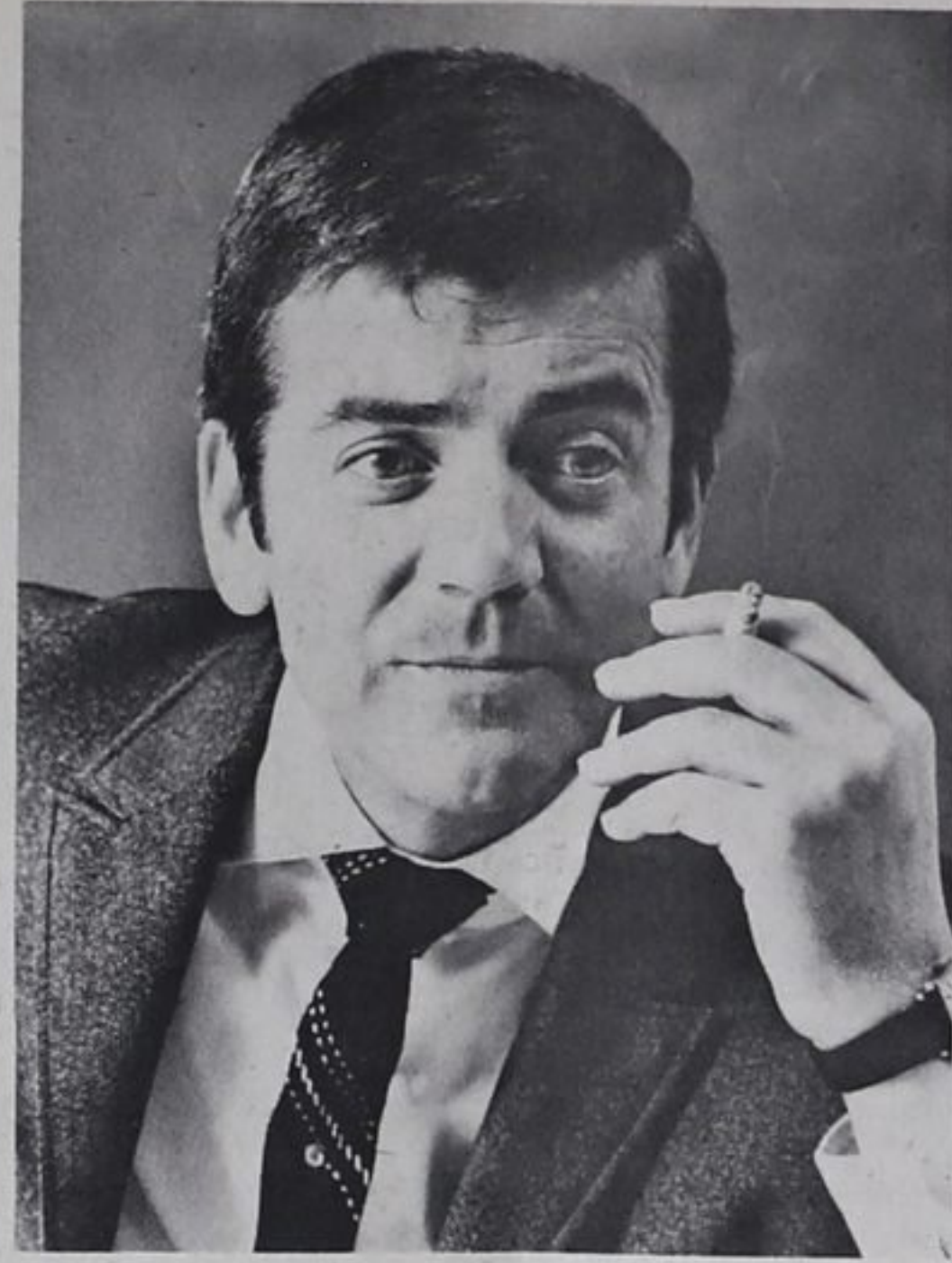
The maxims that underlie Mulcahy's attitudes to theatre are simple and direct. "An American director defined the role of director this way: 'A director is an artist who creates an atmosphere in which other actors can work.' That's perfectly put."

Comedy? "Remember what Chaplin said. 'If what you're doing is funny, don't be funny doing it.'"

And from his days at Britain's Sandhurst, he adopted the military maxim, "Maintain the aim."

His immediate aim is to surpass Gryphon's already high reputation for exuberant and entertaining summer theatre.

We're in for another good summer. Sean Mulcahy said so.



Sean Mulcahy

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Female workers could well be 'a-workin' on the railway' before the end of the summer. The Canada Manpower Centre for Students reports that female post-secondary students are finding it difficult to obtain summer employment. So Student placement officer Carol Larmand and director Wendy McNiece decided to prove that what men can do — women can do.

Many of the summer workers at the site, who were placed by the Student Manpower office, gathered around to watch the demonstration. Under the heat of the blazing afternoon sun, Carol and Wendy successfully wrestled many railroad spikes out of the old track bed with the aid of a pair of heavy-duty spike bars.

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St. Mark's Anglican Church on June 8 hosted representatives from area churches of Penetanguishene, Elmvale, Wyebridge and Waverley at a meeting where the Rev. Douglas Blackwell of the Anglican Church, Aurora Conference Centre was guest speaker.

Such changes will demand more involvement and will receive direct attention and needed aid in finances and personnel for parish planning.

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