

**C E N T R E
I N T E R N A T I O N A L
D ' A R T
C O N T E M P O R A I N
D E M O N T R É A L**

From the series "Mapping the Automatists in Montreal", #117

**Theatrical evening at Congress Hall, 1947
454, Dorchester Boulevard West
(now René-Lévesque Blvd West)**

Claude Gosselin, C.M., August 4th, 2020

On May 20, 1947, several "Automatists" joined forces to present a MODERN THEATER show to a small and select audience. The play was presented at Congress Hall, which was associated to Saint Patrick's parish. This venue had existed since 1915 and was created to meet the needs of the Irish Catholic community in Montreal: it included a conventional auditorium for conferences and shows.



Saint Patrick's Congress Hall, 454, Dorchester Street West (now René-Lévesque Blvd West), built in 1914. Photo: William Notman, 1915. McCord Museum.

Sent to friends and acquaintances of the group, the invitation for the evening, reads as follows:

For this first manifestation of a new dramatic form, there will be a single performance which will not be very long and will be strictly private. It will take place on Tuesday, May 20, 1947, at Congress Hall, 454 Dorchester Street West at 8:30 p.m. This letter serves as an invitation. In order to cover part of the expenses necessary for the proper production of the show, spectators are free to make a contribution. R.S.V.P. 75 Sherbrooke Street West, Apartment 5. Tel. Harbour 2623.

75, Sherbrooke Street West, Apartment 5 was the residence of Mrs. Gauvreau, Claude and Pierre's mother.

The first play, "**UNE PIÈCE SANS TITRE**" by **TJ Maekens** (pseudonym of Jean Meunier) was performed by Lise Guyot, Gilles Hénault, Jean Saint-Denis, Yves Lasnier, Tamar, André Pouliot, Jean-Paul Mousseau. Jean Meunier was stage director, set and costumes were by Marcel Barbeau and Jean-Paul Mousseau.

Then "**BIEN-ÊTRE**" by **Claude Gauvreau**, the evening's second play, was written for a male character which he played and a female character which was played by Muriel Guilbault. Two other actors, Jean Mercier, and André Pouliot were in the cast with very discreet interventions at the end of the play. At the piano, Guy Dubreuil. The staging was by Claude Gauvreau, the costumes by Magdeleine Arbour, the newsprint decor by Pierre Gauvreau and the technical production by Maurice Perron.

The play "Bien-être" gave several concerns to its creators: Pierre Gauvreau's decor had to be repaired during the intermission and, during the play, spectators got agitated and laughed while others left before the end. Claude Gauvreau and Muriel Guilbault remained impassive the entire time they were on stage. Among those who stayed until the end were Paul-Émile Borduas, Gratien Gélinas, and Robert LaPalme. Borduas said "Among our crowd of friends, barely five (outside the group) came out intact in my admiration" (Paul-Émile Borduas, *Projections libérantes*, Éditions Mithra-Mythe, 1949, p. 34). It must be said that "Bien-être" was a surrealist play, very different from the type of theater that was presented in Montreal at that time.

To read the play *Bien-être*:

<http://claudegauvreau.blogspot.com/2007/12/bien-tre.html>

Translation by Vincent Godin-Filion, proofreading by Dominique Robb.

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