

Theater Review

A NEW LITHUANIAN PLAY HAS PREMIERE IN CHICAGO

At the end of the 1957-58 theatrical season, Chicago with its populous Lithuanian colony was host to the first performance of a new Lithuanian play, **Vėjas Gluosniuose** (The Wind in the Willows) by Algirdas Landsbergis. This "modern miracle play" by a playwright of the younger generation was presented as a part of the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the birth of Saint Kazimieras (Casimir), patron saint of Lithuania.

The play, set in the second half of the 16th century, opens with the Saint at midnight and a "young and inexperienced" Angel soaring earthward through space. Below, two armies confront each other: the Lithuanian-Polish and the Russian. The Saint's task is to perform a miracle in favor of the former only at dawn, but he wants to use the time in between to visit a castle at the border of Lithuania and Livonia where his nephew, the King of the Lithuanian-Polish commonwealth is stationed, and to meet some people from his beloved city of Vilnius which he misses very much.

Once on earth, the Saint assumes a shape of a young student and the Angel that of a Jesuit. And, immediately, the heavenly visitors are entangled in earthly complications which impede their quick return. The Angel is whisked away to the castle hall for a theological jousting match with a visiting emissary of Martin Luther. The Saint gets involved in the problems of an atheist nobleman in love with astronomy whom the wife of the chatelain loves; a guard who yearns to escape serfdom in order to marry; and another guard, a bankrupt squire, who dreams about the forbidden merchant's profession. When the Saint endeavors to impart on them his message and his wisdom, he has to realize painfully that human language is as beautiful and as incommunicative as when he was alive. Still he feels a great love for the three and wants to convert them and to help them to attain happiness. Therefore he is shaken when the Angel tells him that all three of them will die in the morning's battle. The Saint falls on his knees and prays fervently for the postponement of the miracle so that the three might be saved.

But no sign from heaven is forthcoming. Then the Saint decides to act: with a ballad he lures the King out of the castle. He finds the King world-weary, defeatist and even considering a retreat at dawn. The Angel and the Saint understand that this would mean the destruction of the retreating army, since the Russians are planning an attack at exactly that time. The Saint interprets this as a sign of God: the miracle must happen and the three must die so that a much greater calamity be averted. But now he has to convert the King to his view and to make him worthy of the miracle. This he does by assembling the three men and their women in the courtyard where the King, in hiding, can hear their problems. Then the King makes a dramatic entrance and grants all of them the fulfilment of their dreams. As he realizes his responsibilities and his power, he feels a new man and he decides to mount an attack at dawn.

The Saint considers his mission as accomplished; it is time to ascend for the miracle. But now the Angel's conscience rebels. He thinks that the three are, perhaps, unjustly sacrificed. He bids the Saint to try everything and to wait for the reversal of God's decision until the last moment. But the Saint is immovable. They leave, and the Angel pledges to come back to earth again and to listen once more to that mortally beautiful human language reminding him of the "wind in the willows".

The reverie of the three happy couples is interrupted by the sound of the battle. The men depart to join the fighting. At that moment the stage is filled with light and the Saint appears in a blaze of glory. "They'll come back. Now they will, they certainly will", exclaim the women as the curtain descends.

The play, as its 45 rehearsals attest, was one of the most meticulous productions of the Lithuanian theatre in exile. Its staff represents a typical cross-section of to-day's Lithuanian thespians in emigration. The director, A. Diki-nis, has started his professional acting career still in Lithuania, in 1943. The King, A. Rūkas is a veteran of the stage of Independent Lithuania, while the set designer, A. Valeška, has been a noted painter for decades. Five members of the cast (V. Juodka, J. Kelečius, I. Nivinskaite, A. Mironas, E. Vi-lutiene) have a gruelling thirteen year experience of the exile theatre behind them; two (E. Blandy-te, J. Raudonis) are more recent newcomers.

This fall the troupe plans to bring "The Wind in the Willows" to New York, Cleveland, Toronto and other cities.

