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A Shocking New Play by Noël Coward?!

[Mississauga ON, October 2012] Theatre Erindale is opening its “Mayhem!” 2012-2013 season with the Canadian Première of a witty drama by Noël Coward. Coward is one of the most-produced playwrights of the twentieth century, and his scripts are still fixtures from Broadway and the West End to our major festivals to English-speaking community theatres around the world. So how is it possible that a play by “The Master” has never been seen on the Canadian boards?

Semi-monde is set in 1924, -25, and -26, as jazz-age jetsetters parade through the lobbies and bars of the great Paris Ritz Hotel. In needle-sharp vignettes that are sometimes funny and sometimes dangerous but always real, Coward pinpoints the kaleidoscope of shifting and interlocking relationships—gay, straight, and confused. “Coward's creatures camouflage their erotic itch under a savage politesse.... The play constantly intrigues,” said Michael Billington in *The Guardian*.

Coward wrote *Semi-Monde* in the first adult decade of his brilliant and multi-faceted career. After making his professional debut at the age of 12, he began writing uncompromising psychological realism in his teens. By the time he was touring Britain and North America starring in *The Vortex* in the mid-twenties, he was regarded as the international spokesperson of a rather shocking younger generation. By 1926 he had also published *Hay Fever*, *Fallen Angels*, and *Easy Virtue*. *Semi-Monde* is about the people he knew and the circles he moved in at this time. In it he pulls no punches. The play was never to be produced in his lifetime, not because of its 30-plus cast size, but because of its frank depiction of the varied sexuality of his characters. Not until 1970 was Coward knighted by the Queen; he died in 1973.

Semi-Monde was first produced by the Glasgow Citizen’s Theatre in 1977, and again in the West End in 2001. The American debut was mounted as a staged reading by The Actors’ Company Theatre in New York City early this year. Theatre Erindale is proud to be presenting the Canadian première of this extraordinary little-known window into a time and place both exotically distant and all too familiar.

At the helm of *Semi-Monde* is special guest director Brian McKay. McKay, the former Artistic Director of the Huron Country Playhouse—who has toured North America playing anything from Jean Valjean to Claudius—has both starred in and directed other Coward shows. Far from being a mere depiction of playtime for the idle rich, he says, the work has gradually revealed itself “with the able assistance of these wonderfully talented actors”, to be “a morality play—beautifully defined and subtly wrought—in which we discover that every action brings consequences ... and no amount of wealth can act as an insulator. ”

Semi-Monde runs October 25 to November 4 at the Erindale Studio Theatre, with evening performances Thursday through Saturday and matinées on Saturdays and on Sunday November 4. Single tickets are still only \$10-\$15 and parking is \$6.50 (use the CCT Garage on Thursdays and Lot 1 or the CCT Garage for other performances). Note that construction is underway next door; check for the latest directions for passenger drop-off or ticket pick-up. Memberships offering 5 shows for the price of 4 are still on sale. For tickets and information, call the Erindale Studio Theatre Box Office at 905-569-4369 or <http://www.theatreerindale.com/>.

Contact: Brian McKay at 519-949-3388
Box Office: 905-569-4369 or
visit www.theatreerindale.com.

Production Photos by Jim Smagata: www.utm.utoronto.ca/academic/theatre/press.htm



Theatre Erindale set design for *Semi-Monde*, by
Peter Urbanek and Patrick Young



Alyssandria Messina and Fraser Woodside in Theatre Erindale's *Semi-Monde*