

**THE MASKERS THEATRE COMPANY
AT
THE NUFFIELD THEATRE**

Labiche's classic French farce

**AN
ITALIAN
STRAW
HAT**

Director - Ken Spencer



CAST IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

Virginia	SHEILA CLARK
Felix	KEN HANN
Vezenet	GRAHAM BUCHANAN
Fadinard	BRIAN STANSBRIDGE
Annette	LINDA EDWARDS
Emile	HARRY TUFFIL
Nonancourt	DAVID JUPP
Helen	BIDDIE ALLEN
Boby	CHRIS WILLIAMS
Clara	ANGELA STANSBRIDGE
Tardiveau	DOUGLAS COATES
La Comtesse de Champigny	AVRIL WOODWARD
Achille de Rosalba	PETER NEVE
A Footman	KENNETH SPENCER
La Duchesse de Chateau Gaillard	MOLLIE MANNS
Mlle Ondine de Chateau La Pompe	ANN ARCHER
Le Duc de Chateau Gaillard	GARDNER CHALMERS
Clotilde	SUE PARKES
M. Beaujolais	BRIAN WHITAKER
A Corporal of the National Guard	GEOFF WHARAM
National Guards	RON TILLYER DOUGLAS TAYLOR WALLY OAKES
Midinettes	LOUISE MOORE JANICE SAINSBURY BELINDA HOLLEYOAK ALISON SMITH
Wedding Guests	THE MASKERS

FOR THE MASKERS

Designed and Directed by .. KENNETH SPENCER

Stage Manager VALERIE BARWELL

Assistant Stage Manager ... ADRIAN CLARK

Stage Carpenter JOHN CHURCHER

Lighting CLIVE WEEKS
ALAN ROLFE

Sound LAURIE GEE
ALAN MOORE

Costume Hire BRISTOL OLD VIC. LTD

Wardrobe Mistress LILLIAN GUNSTONE

Business Management GRAHAM BUCHANAN

Programme Design BRIAN STANSBRIDGE

AN ITALIAN STRAW HAT

Scene 1 - Fadinard's Apartment. Morning.

Scene 2 - A Milliner's Salon. Noon.

Scene 3 - Mme de Champigny's Drawing Room.
Afternoon.

Scene 4 - Beaujolais' Apartment. Evening

Scene 5 - A Square in Paris. Night.

There will be an interval of twenty minutes
between Scenes three and four.

Eugène Labiche

Eugene Marin Labiche was born in Paris on May 5, 1815, the son of wealthy middle-class parents. He attended the Lycee Condorcet and, though an indifferent student, passed his examinations brilliantly owing to his phenomenal memory. He also took a degree in law at the University of Paris, though he never practiced.

After a tour of Italy in 1834, he returned to Paris to establish himself in the literary world. He visited the cafes and theatres and haunted newspaper offices in the hope of gaining recognition as a writer and his short stories and drama critiques soon began to appear in minor papers. During this period he married, wrote a novel (printed at his expense), and collaborated with Marc-Antoine-Amedee Michel and Augustin Lefranc on the play "M. de Coislin or The Politest of Men".

In 1844 Labiche decided to concentrate on writing for the theatre and soon produced two vaudevilles (light musical comedies of one or two acts). The emergence of a predominantly middle-class society in France provided Labiche with an audience and continuing in the vaudeville tradition he gained success with comic satires of the new class. "M. Perrichon's Voyage", his 113th published play, at last secured his position as an important comedy writer, not merely the "King of Vaudeville". In 1861 he became a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor, and his new status was consecrated when the comedy "Myself" was commissioned by the Comedie-Francaise. Earlier that year he produced "Pots of Money" which was destined to be one of his most popular plays.

Labiche left Paris in 1870 to live in the district of Sologne, where he became mayor of Souvigny. Thereafter he began to lose interest in writing, but in 1876 he collaborated with Emile Augier on a three-act comedy, "The Martin Prize", and with Ernest Legouve on "Grasshopper among the Ants" before ceasing to write altogether. He had to be persuaded by a friend to allow the publication of his works in 1879. This collection was so successful that, again encouraged by friends, he applied for and was admitted to membership in the Academie Francaise in 1880. One of Labiche's favorite comic ploys is to present characters who have to keep a secret from the others. The dissimulators are obliged to agree among themselves, bringing about a comedy-within-a-comedy. The intricacies

of this structural device result in a great deal of humorous wordplay and double entendre and contribute to the movement of the play. For example, the wedding guests in "An Italian Straw Hat" are completely unaware of Fadinard's frantic efforts to replace the straw hat eaten earlier by his horse. It was this play that the influential critic Francisque Sarcey called "a revolution in vaudeville."

After his retirement from writing Labiche devoted the rest of his life to his family and farm, but his already prodigious body of work was to leave its influence on French domestic comedy. He died in Paris on January 12, 1888, having authored or co-authored 172 plays.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

NUFFIELD THEATRE

"A Street Car Named Desire"

by Tennessee Williams

Commencing 14th June 1983

Box Office : Southampton 555028

MOTTISFONT ABBEY

IN THE OPEN AIR

"TOM JONES"

by Henry Fielding

Commencing July 1983

See Publicity and Press for Details