

these two productions, the theatre would have come close to breaking even. A warm summer evening at Rainbow Stage was a magical experience for families and especially for children. Winnipeg's vibrant arts and musical scene produced high calibre singers, dancers, and technical talent, even though most were amateurs. Several young Winnipeg singers, actors and directors cut their performing teeth at Rainbow Stage and went on to professional careers: Len Cariou, Joan Karasevich, Edward Evanko and John Hirsch to name a few. For the vast majority of people involved in putting on a show at Rainbow who had day jobs and no professional performing ambitions, the experience was an unforgettable one. They had to be ready for anything. One night during a 1958 run of "The King and I", props mistress Grace Thomson found herself being the third set of legs under the papier maché dragon when the original "legs" took sick.

The Winnipeg Summer Theatre Association (WSTA), as the body that ran productions at Rainbow Stage was by then called, knew that the theatre was filling a need. Not for the last time, they tried to find the winning formula that would guarantee consistently good attendance. The 1957 season was as ambitious as 1956. There were three musicals - "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes", "Can-Can" and "Chu Chin Chow" - and sev-

eral plays, carnival shows and square dancing evenings. The result was a disastrous \$27,000 loss to which the guarantors contributed only \$20,000. The Parks and Recreation Board had to pick up the balance. Grudgingly, J. Wilson, the president of the Summer Theatre Association, admitted that the plays and carnival shows had been duds

and that seat prices were possibly too high. There was no magic formula, he said. "The only answer, or at least the best answer, lies in selecting shows which the public will throng to see, in staging these at a moderate cost and offering them at popular prices." This was easier said than done, as successive producers at Rainbow Stage have found.

The 1958 season was a make or break season for the new theatre. That year the WSTA functioned independently of the Parks and Recreation Board for the first time. The City Council gave the association a direct grant of \$8,000 and the association paid the Parks and Recreation Board a rental fee of \$4,000. The WSTA's relationship with the



Mayor Stephen Juba confers with his stage alter ego during Rainbow Stage's production of "Hell's a Poppin' in Winnipeg", 1958. WPRD.

board was tightly defined within a rental agreement. The board retained its responsibility for the physical upkeep of the theatre but was no longer responsible for the production end of the operation. With the future of the theatre on the line the summer of 1958 proved to be the most successful yet. Three musicals - "Brigadoon", "Hell's a Poppin' in Winnipeg" and "The King and I" - played to a respectable 50 percent average attendance which resulted in only a slight loss on the season. The well attended "Hell's a Poppin' in Winnipeg" was a variety review satirizing Winnipeg events and people. Directed by John Hirsch and with words and music by Neil Harris, "Hell's a Poppin'" had its share