



Chronicle, Clifford Skarstedt

Members of the Wahoo Family Theatre Company run through a scene from their upcoming production of Molière's *The Misanthrope*.

Theatre company puts new twist on Molière

By HOLLIE WATSON

Fringe fare. That's what the newly-formed Wahoo Family Theatre Company has in mind for local audiences.

Rising from the ashes, as it were, of the short-lived Kindergarten Players, the fledgling troupe is comprised of former members and a host of new talent.

Theirs is an experimental approach, a departure from the tried and true, explains artistic director Donovan King.

Through unusual scripts and alternative interpretations, the company hopes "to bring good theatre with a point, as an art, to the West Island," said King, a long-time Pointe Claire resident.

The piece that has been chosen for the first production — a 17th-century classic — may at first glance appear to be a conservative choice.

But the Wahoo Family has put their own spin on Molière's *The Misanthrope*. While the translated script (composed entirely of rhymed couplets) is adhered to verbatim, "the mood, setting and dress have been altered," King said.

The contemporary backdrop for the French dra-

matist's study of morality is "Sneers," a popular watering hole where everybody knows your name.

"The focus is the West Island bar scene," said King.

The Misanthrope is about artifice, the facades behind which people hide and the games they play.

"At the beginning it seems funny," King said. "But then the characters' true colors come out."

Despite the fact that he's a literary institution of long standing, Jean Baptiste Coquelin IV, a royal upholsterer turned actor/playwright, was considered anything but conservative in his day.

With satiric works like *Tartuffe*, *The Misanthrope* and others, Molière roasted the absurdities of the age and incurred the wrath of both King Louis XIV and the Catholic Church.

In 1659, he was publicly condemned "an enemy of morality, a demon in the flesh who should be burned at the stake as foretaste of the fires of hell."

Initially denied a Christian burial when he died at age 51, the funeral was held at night to avoid scandal but saw thousands of admirers attend in a dramatic torchlight procession.

In the Wahoo production, gone are the courtiers

of old. In their place are the fixtures of the club scene.

"We'll have a bouncer and check people's ID at the door," King said. "The audience is in the show. We want the whole experience to be like going to a bar."

Cast as *Aleeste*, the *Misanthrope*, is Adam Morton. The object of his affections is the coquette Célimène, played by Heidi Weekes.

Like the majority of the troupe, they are West Island residents currently studying theatre at either the CEGEP or university level.

The company hasn't decided on its next production. For now the members are taking things one step at a time, King says.

They do intend to join the Quebec Drama Festival and are tentatively planning to revive a medieval acting tradition at Christmas that would involve carolling with scripts door to door.

The Misanthrope will be staged at Gaping Mouth Studio at John Rennie High School, 501 St. John's Blvd., Pointe Claire, on Oct. 21, 22, 28 and 29. Curtain time is 8 p.m. For ticket reservations call 694-8129.