ON the partially lit, semi-circular stage of the Théâtre de l'Égérie, a pretty, young girl sat tightly strapped in a chair, flanked on each side by the menacing figures of two heavy-set men.

A third man loomed darkly over her and shouted in a raspy voice — "so you won't talk, eh." There was the sharp sound of a ripped dress, a pair of scissors slowly appeared in violent hands, a metallic snip was heard and an agonizing scream from the mutilated girl filled the room and continued for some moments until the lights went out.

The scene was not an enactment from a Mike Hammer or a James Bond novel. No, it was a preview bit of a play in true Grand Guignol style and come September 11, hardly Montrealers will be able to see a full-length, genuine production of a phenomenon that has attracted worldwide attention ever since 1895.

Le Théâtre du Grand Guignol de Paris is probably as well-known to persons who have never been to Paris, as it is to those who have waded through its blood-splattered productions at rue Chaptal in Pigalle. Two years ago the theatre was closed on account of failure of business and Paris was never quite the same again for tourists eager to see a unique spectacle whose inferno stage scenes of torture and violence have never been duplicated anywhere else.

DIRECTING a LOCAL French cast at the Orpheum in two plays that matter, by the way, is theatre bryer, Guy Hoffman, who will be renewing acquaintance with a company for whom he performed many years ago as a young actor in Paris. He noted that the experience has a profound effect on him, as it has on other prominent stage figures who made their debut there.

In accordance with Grand Guignol tradition a tragedy, "La Violence," will open the proceedings, to be followed by a comedy, "L'École du Strip-Tease." This is the pattern that filled the 200-seat Paris house for over 70 years — first horrifying the audience into cold shock and then reviving them with a quick piece of fun so they will exit laughing. The French refer to this technique of hot and cold as le couche d'eczéme.

Producers of the show are Cinepix. John Dunning and Walt Dodds acquired the rights to Grand Guignol and brought over its long time director, Charles Nonon, to supervise productions. In an attempt to attract a mass audience the producers state that prices will be kept

extremism with Marquis de Sade for ever, is certainly true.

But it has in its time also served some useful purposes. On its stages boards have appeared the works of such authors as Feydeau, Chéreau, Moussa, Leon and others. Its influence on directors, writers and actors, on the techniques that led to the theatre of the absurd and other extreme styles, cannot be denied.

Most of the plays, usually 30 to 40 minutes in length only, since four were mounted each evening, are created by writers who specialize in the kind of apocalyptic horrors suited to the requirements of Guignol. Some of the quiet titles are — "Les Bourreaux de Têtes," "La Dernière Torture," "Laboratoire des Illusions," and so on.

The reasons for the demise of Grand Guignol are attributable by Mr. Nonon to television, too many cars and to quidrals that sprung up among the directors when the Guignol became a Société Anonyme. It flourished most strongly, he said, after wars, during the 20s and 30s.

Will it ever return to Paris? He believes so, on the grounds that its masochistic appeal is basic and universal. So sure were the Paris directors of their Guignol that a doctor was always on hand to take care of the men and women who fainted during the more gory episodes. Whether Montrealers possess more sophisticated resilience will soon be known.

GRAND GUIGNOL

PRESENTÉ DE PARIS SUR SCÈNE

SPÉCIAL CHOC ET D'HORREUR

LA VIOLENCE

DRAME EN 2 ACTES

ÉCOLE DU STRIP-TEASE

COMÉDIE EN 1 ACTE

AUSSI UN GRAND FRANÇAIS COULEURS

LES BELLES BACCHANTES

ROBERT DHERY avec les

100 PLUS BELLES FEMMES DE PARIS

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