

Meet Lucien, a guy you will identify with

BY KRIS KETONEN
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Blue-collar philosopher Lucien is coming to Thunder Bay.

Lucien Snowbird is the next production of the Magnus Theatre season, with writer-star Marshall Button bringing his character and his wide-ranging thoughts to the stage for a two-week run starting tonight.

For example: "We couldn't be a part of day George Bushwacker's war because our 'elicopter was at day Canadian Tire for a fixee."

Button, who lives in New Brunswick first wrote Lucien — who speaks in a unique Acadian blend of French and English — for that province's bicentennial in 1984 as a two-minute monologue for a dinner theatre. Lucien has taken off since then, appearing in three full-length plays as well as CBC television performances.

Lucien Snowbird just came off an extended run at the Upper Canada Theatre near Ottawa.

"Before I got into show business, I worked in a paper mill,"

Button said. "I guess it's natural when you're trying to make it as an actor, you're trying to act up, play the fool, even at parties or social occasions, the way you tell jokes."

"What I was doing, unbeknownst to myself, I was doing impersonations of many of the guys I worked with in the mill among fellow theatre people," he said.

They'd ask about the characters, wondering if they were from a play or something. Button told them they're just people he worked with.

But the response was good enough that Button began taking notes about the characters and jokes he did. This was back in the early 1980s, and the two-minute debut of Lucien, which started in Fredericton, caught on and toured around the rest of New Brunswick for much of that year.

"This character went from two minutes to 20 minutes in the show, just through improvisation," Button said. "After that, I had the idea of maybe

making a full show, so it was developed and premiered at Theatre New Brunswick, which is the province's biggest

time and then we'll leave it alone. But then the phone rings and I get an interesting offer."

The second Lucien play, Lucien's Labour Lost, was a commission work for Theatre New Brunswick, Button said. It concerned blue-collar mill workers dealing with a shift to a knowledge-based, high-tech, modernized workforce. The third, Lucien Snowbird, sees Lucien doing a "test run" for retirement by heading down to Florida.

In the meantime, Lucien shares his thoughts on topics like Canada-U.S. relations, love, sports and aging.

Button believes the appeal of Lucien is twofold: first, he doesn't pull any punches or worry about pesky political correctness, and second, Lucien the character is somebody everybody has met.

"While you were going to school and you had a summer job working in the woods, or driving a truck or working at a warehouse or something, he's

probably someone that you spent eight, 10, 12 hours with quite a bit," Button said.

"That's the constant thing I keep hearing: 'oh, he's just like my brother-in-law,' or 'he's just like so-and-so I worked with back in the late '60s.'"

And, Button said, Lucien is funny and optimistic, despite the setbacks in his own life.

He also enjoys the company of others, including the imaginary character who shows up in all three shows, evolving from a summer student in the first play to a lawyer in the second. In the third, the character has left the practice of law and is doing quite well in Toronto real estate.

Lucien meets the character while the latter is on his third honeymoon, Button said.

"I guess the biggest compliment people say is 'oh, it's true. It's so true,'" he said. "I guess that's part of the goal, try and tell it like it is, if you will."

Lucien Snowbird runs from Oct. 28 to Nov. 13. For ticket visit the Magnus Theatre box office at 10 S. Algoma St., call 807-345-5552.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Marshall Button as Lucien in Lucien Snowbird, which opens at Thunder Bay's Magnus Theatre tonight.

English theatre company, in 1986.

"Probably since then I don't know that I've gone more than a month without doing it somewhere, whether it's for a conference . . . or theatre runs like this, which I really enjoy. It's something that I just keep thinking well, OK, I'll do it this