

Lucien Snowbird warms the heart

TIMING is everything. Magnus Theatre's decision to present Lucien Snowbird at this particular time is an excellent one. And Marshall Button's performance as Lucien is a master class in timing. Single-handedly he forges a delightful comic bond with his audience. In his hands, a highly idiosyncratic individual — one middle-aged mill worker from New Brunswick's North Shore — emerges as an Everyman who cuts through geographical differences and unites us for a time in shared Canadian experience.

Lucien Snowbird is the third installment in the saga of a character writer/actor Button has developed from firsthand observation, a persona his creator inhabits with ease and obvious pleasure. In this chapter of his life, 53-year-old Lucien is practising for the "Freedom 55" of retirement by taking advantage of the perks offered by a Florida condominium time-share company. The sound, set and lighting designs reinforce the warmth, colour and plastic tackiness of



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this context. A sandy beach, boardwalk and tiki hut bar are juxtaposed against a painted backdrop featuring palm trees and pastels. Lucien is a beached fish-out-of-water in his tropical shirt and calf-length grey wool work socks.

Button's narrative reunites Lucien with the "young fella" of an earlier time and place: an invisible former co-worker who provides an audience for wide-ranging anecdotes and observations on life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Prowling the stage, Lucien reveals his Macbeth-like ambition to take over America one time-share unit at a time. In

his trademark blend of English, French and fractured "franglish" he pontificates on family dynamics, aging, weight loss strategies, technology as well as Canadian and American politics and cultural differences.

But given the newsworthiness of these political landscapes, Lucien's observations can be topical and astute. He recounts asking a 70-year-old American why she works at McDonald's at her age; she is still paying medical bills associated with her husband's death decades before. A passing reference is made to Ralph Klein and privatization. The anecdote is over, but its impact remains. It is a cautionary tale told not by a buffoon, but by a Canadian native son during a hard-won week of ex-patriot vacationing. Button peppers his script with other thought-provoking material but his hand is light and assured; he knows his alter ego and his audience well.

Ultimately Lucien questions his Americanized ambition. Sand runs through his fingers as he contemplates the tomorrows in his future. But this Maritimer's spirit resurfaces as he watches a magnificent ocean sunset, a touchstone that speaks of home and defies time and place. These final images, choreographed sensitively by director Donnie Bowes, linger in the memory like a favourite holiday snapshot. Treat yourself to a getaway of your own by joining Lucien on the beach. You deserve it.

