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RENAISSANCE?

Elements for a Vital Theatre Exist But They Have to Be Put Together

By LEE STRASBERG

Artistic Director of the Actors' Studio

At the end of each theatrical season it is customary to summarize the achievements of that year. The existence of a number of sizable hits of not too low a quality is taken to mean that the theatre is blooming. If some theatres are empty and hits few, the theatre is dying.

—in the case of the Group Theatre, a company too confined in its range, errors and limitations in its play policy, a negative attitude toward the classics—doomed their future. In addition, the "movies" had become the "talkies."

The generation of which I am a part came into the theatre on the wings of a dream. Few of us who entered the theatre as actors were physically of the type to dream of ourselves as stars.

Something happened in the next years that I have never personally been able to explain. When I left New York for Hollywood in the early Forties it was in the typical throes of a war boom, my own feelings were of discouragement and lack of direction.

Unity Demanded

The modern movement in the theatre reached America after the First World War. It proclaimed that the theatre was an art and worthy of the respect, dedication and devotion accorded to the other arts.

The success of a number of the people associated with the Group Theatre such as Ella Kazan and Robert Lewis led to the organization that was born so quietly and unostentatiously, no one could have perceived the importance of its founding.

The vision of the theatre was strengthened by what we saw. Fine plays by new American playwrights who were creating a modern American idiom. Performances by many American actors, among which I remember with pleasure and with nostalgia the fragility and beauty of Eva Le Gallienne, the vigor and exuberance of the young Schildkraut.

At the present moment we are presented with a strange picture. All the elements that are needed to fulfill the dream of a vital contemporary theatre are now in existence. A talented generation of actors that possesses both talent and prestige and shares a common heritage of training and enthusiasm.

Possibilities Seen

But the vision of the theatre was most completely captured by the scene designer. It was here we saw the possibilities of the theatre. For the actor and director, while individually excellent, were not always able to live up to the vision created by the scene designer.

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Artistic Credo

The creation of organizations such as the Civic Repertory Theatre and the Group Theatre sprang from this incentive. The creation of a literary repertoire at popular prices showed there was a large untapped public. The creation of an ensemble recognized as outstanding gave promise of creating the kind of theatre other countries prided themselves on possessing.

But while my hopes are optimistic, my practical vision is pessimistic. The conditions for great theatre today exist. But there exists equally too much of a tendency to confuse a theatre with the building which houses it, a dream against a ledger, great theatre with good manners.



PLAYBILL AT 2 STRATFORDS —"THE WINTER'S TALE"

In the Connecticut version (above), opening today, Richard Easton and Inga Swenson, left, play Florizel and Perdita; at right, foreground, are Barbara Barrie as Dorcas, Earl Hyman as Autolycus and June Ericson as Mopsa.



NEWS AND GOSSIP GATHERED ALONG THE RIALTO

By LEWIS FUNKE "ACTIVATE the 'Queen of Sheba' file," producer Alexander H. Cohen ordered last week in tones sufficiently imperious for a man embracing royalty, no matter how long deceased.

composer Arthur Schwartz and lyricist Howard Dietz. Indeed, on a wave of optimism, Mr. Cohen is celebrating his thirty-eighth birthday this week and his seventeenth year in show business by drawing neat circles around Oct. 15, 1959.

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ADDENDA: Since Mr. Cohen has no intention of remaining out of the news while plans are formulating for "The Queen of Sheba," it can be recounted that he is devoting his extra energy to producing the Integrated Showcase for Actors Equity for two performances, Sept. 23-29; that he is supervising a public relations study on behalf of the League of New York Theatres, of which he is a vice president; that he is booking productions for two Philadelphia theatres he now represents, the Locust and the Erlanger.

they can be shipped, but, on the uncompromising insistence of the toy makers the toys must be placed in boxes especially built so that the creations will not be crushed or broken in transit. Approximate cost of crating that could go aboard a ship, \$350; aboard a plane, \$1,000.

Georges Feydeau's farce "Occupe-toi d'Amélie." You can add this morning that Mr. Coward has still another idea he is nourishing in the inspiring climate of Clausonne—he is considering a musical to be based upon the life of Emily Dickinson.

PROJECT: There is, it turns out, a postscript to the news from Clausonne. Constant readers of this department will recall that during the last fortnight the intelligence from the little town in the south of France was that Noël Coward was moving along nicely on his latest project, an adaptation of

DECORATION: Sir John Gielgud, soon to tour this country and Canada with his reading program, "The Ages of Man," has just received the insignia of a Chevalier of the Légion d'Honneur. The honor was bestowed upon him by the French Ambassador in London after the reading program in Paris and Sir John's direction there of Berlioz' opera "Les Troyens."

ROUND-UP: "Whoop-Up," the new musical producers Cy

SHOWS TODAY

MATINEE—Blood Wedding, Children of Darkness, The Boy Friend, The Playboy of the Western World, The Threepenny Opera. EVENING—All of the above plus Comic Strip, Guests of the Nation, You Never Can Tell.

Feuer and Ernest Martin are planning for Broadway, has been booked for the Schubert for Dec. 18. . . . Contemplated for an off-Broadway production is a Negro version of "A Streetcar Named Desire," in which Hilda Simms would be the star. . . . Without advance warning, "Li'l Abner" called it a run a week ago last night. . . . Sam Levene will impersonate a harried television producer in his next Broadway appearance, "Make a Million," scheduled for September rehearsals. . . . "Bells Are Ringing" is on vacation until Aug. 11. . . . Closed last night: "Oh Captain!"

NEW AND OLD PLAYS ON WEST END

By W. A. DARLINGTON

LONDON. ONE charge that never can be laid at the door of the London theatregoing public is that of ingratitude toward its old favorites. It has a memory for their doings that is both long and warm, and its welcome when they return after no matter how many years, as, for instance, Charles Laughton and Elsa Lanchester did last month, has the genuine ring of pleasure.

here except as shadows on a screen; but before they went they had an eager following that now filled the little Duchesse Theatre with an atmosphere that may well have made Miss Marshall feel less like a visiting foreign star than a returning resident.

This month we have seen how the same welcome is extended to the second generation. In a drollish succession of minor new productions only one held out any great promise of importance—a comedy called "The Velvet Shotgun," in which Sarah Marshall was to make her London debut.

Warm Reception

When the curtain went down at the end of the evening it was clear that Miss Marshall had not outstayed her welcome. The applause was again warm, and this time it was not for anybody's daughter. It was for Miss Marshall herself as an actress with a clear, sharp style of her own, a personality in her own right very much to be reckoned with, and next morning the press, while (with one or two considerable exceptions) professing itself bored with or contemptuous of the play, confirmed the favorable verdict on Miss Marshall.

the man she did love marry her in spite of it. All this adds up, of course, to quite a social problem: It always has. But the author made this young woman discuss it at such length and with so little sense of real urgency that for many people she became a bore in spite of all that Miss Marshall could do.

Whatever she was, the play-going public showed no desire to make her acquaintance; people will not willingly take even a remote risk of being bored. She vanished from the scene in a very few days; and, of course, unhappily, Miss Marshall had to vanish with her.

An interesting revival, which at this writing is still too recent for any guess to be made at its prospects of success, is Bayard Veiller's famous crime play of thirty years back, "The Trial of Mary Dugan." The interest lies in the fact that in one sense—dramatic sense—the piece is as good and as fresh as ever it was, and yet in spite of that it is undeniably old hat. Nothing in the actual story is out of date, and the close reproduction of American court-room procedure is as fascinating as ever; but none of the theatrical surprises is any longer surprising.



MARK—Anne Seymour and Ralph Bellamy in "Sunrise at Campobello," which has its 200th showing Wednesday.

SEEING SIGHTS

South Seas Are Scanned in New Cinerama Film

By BOSLEY CROWTHER

ON its fifth time around, Cinerama is offering yet another travelogue, which makes it appear the proprietors of the wide-screen process are pretty well settled into a straight sight-seeing groove. In their first offering, "This Is Cinerama," which was launched six years ago upon a public that obligingly reacted as though a new planet had swung into its ken, the producer of that item, Lowell Thomas, simply let his sightseeing fancy range. And they came up with a travelogue that hop-skipped all over the world.

Their next one, brought forth by Louis de Rochemont and called "Cinerama Holiday," confined its sightseeing exclusively to Switzerland, France and the United States. But again Mr. Thomas went roving in the subsequent "Seven Wonders of the World" and covered as much territory as Mike Todd's people got around in eighty days. His last, "Search for Paradise," found him still sightseeing in Kashmir and Nepal. That was the Cinerama score.

Camera Cruise

Now, in their new "South Seas Adventure," which opened at the Warner last week, the Cinerama people are once more at it, but Mr. Thomas has gone by the board. This time they have Carl Dudley to take their customers on a king-size camera cruise of some beautiful and interesting islands of the Pacific, from Hawaii to Australia. And it's all very happy and attractive, in a simple, non-reflective way.

With about the same air of tourism that Mr. Thomas started "Seven Wonders of the World," Mr. Dudley embarks us in a luxury ship Hawaii-bound. He has us learning to dance the hula with a bunch of obvious "tripper" types and generally partaking of the pastimes that go with the bargain-budget tour. For a brief time, it looks as though we've bought it for a real corny couple of hours.

However, Mr. Dudley does rescue us on the beach at Waikiki by taking us out for a bit of surfboard riding on that huge, roaring "wrap-around" screen. And from that point on, "South Seas Adventure" becomes progressively more alive, until it circles back to Hawaii and a standard sunset fade.

By airplane, it jumps us to Tahiti and some wonderful blue and emerald views of atolls lying in the empty ocean, with lacy surf fringing their shores. It shows us some snappy shimmy dancing and javelin throwing at a gala in Papeete, and recalls, through a visiting French painter, the inspiration this place gave to Paul Gauguin. Then it takes us, by placid trading schooner, to the island of Tonga, where we hear a handsome brown-skinned choir (in snow white clothing) singing Handel's "Messiah" in their native tongue. Other brisk things are looked at in Fiji and in the New Hebrides.

Personal Drama

Most exciting, however, are the visits to New Zealand and Australia, for these places assume their right proportions in excellent color on the giant tri-paneled screen. The scenery is utterly exquisite—much more so than we had ever realized—and the population is presented in warmly human and fascinating scenes. Best of these give dramatic description to the operation of the "school of the air," which is the system of educating the children of isolated sheep-ranchers in the "out back" of Australia by radio.

Thus, you see, while Mr. Dudley (and Cinerama) take us mainly on a sight-seeing tour, they manage this time to come up with human material that has some drama and meaning, too. By introducing and personalizing a sheep-ranching family, instead of personalizing Mr. Thomas, as he was wont to do, Mr. Dudley has put likely individuals in his travelogue. He does this several times in other places. And it gives some human dimension to his film.

True, "South Seas Adventure" is a long way from being the kind of panoramic dramatic show—or even the kind of geographic documentary—we think is possible on the Cinerama screen. But, at least, Mr. Dudley has done some reaching. He has also improved techniques. There are several close-ups and dissolves in this picture, so that the cinematic movement is more fluid. And it is sprinkled nicely with humor, as for instance a lively shot that shows the Australian landscape bounding toward you, "as seen from a kangaroo's pouch," the narrator says. Indeed, there is promise in this effort. Maybe those silvery clouds on the horizon are the prophetic ones no bigger than a man's hand, as they say.