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STAR OF THE CITY CENTER'S TENTH ANNIVERSARY SEASON IN HIS FOUR ROLES

SALUTE TO ACTORS

Trio of New Plays With Notable Performances

By BROOKS ATKINSON

WHEN Mrs. Pinchwife returned from the theatre in "The Country Wife" nearly three centuries ago, she made a prophetic remark: "Indeed, I was weary of the play, but I liked hugely the actors." Probably there has never been a time in the English-speaking theatre when the general level of acting has not been higher than the general level of playwriting. Certainly that has been the situation in early November. Those of us who trudged to the theatre to see in quick succession "The Trip to Bountiful," "Kind Sir" and "The Solid Gold Cadillac" are inclined to regard Mrs. Pinchwife as all too contemporaneous.

Good performances in inadequate plays indicate that the playwrights have at least written parts that can be acted. The telephone book is not a good acting script, despite frequent statements to the contrary. It lacks wit and passion, although its craftsmanship is perfect. Of the three plays to be discussed in today's bulletin, Norman Krasna's "Kind Sir" does the least for the actors. It is a singularly empty romance about some stuffy people caught in a situation too spurious to be worth explaining here.

Given the parts Mr. Krasna has written for them, it is difficult to see what more Mary Martin, Charles Boyer and their colleagues can do. They are charming. In fact, Miss Martin and Mr. Boyer are incandescent; their charm is not a passive element but constructive. The theatre comes alive when they appear on the stage. In addition to professional skill, which is not rare on the stage, they have the celestial magic that sets them apart from ordinary players and casts a spell on the audience. No amount of rationalizing about actors can systematize the faculty some of them have for lighting up a theatre by their presence on the stage.

Lavish Production

In "Kind Sir" Joshua Logan has directed them resourcefully and placed them in an ostentatious production. Jo Mielziner's brilliantly lit sets seek of affluence; Main Bocher's costumes have the grandeur of a Coronation ball. Everything is costly and dazzling. But after the first act, which is reasonably promising, it quickly becomes obvious that Miss Martin and Mr. Boyer have nothing but their own charm to work with. Charm is not an enduring substitute for characters and a situation that can stir the imagination of the audience. Miss Martin and Mr. Boyer are not the only ones who are stranded in this leaky script.

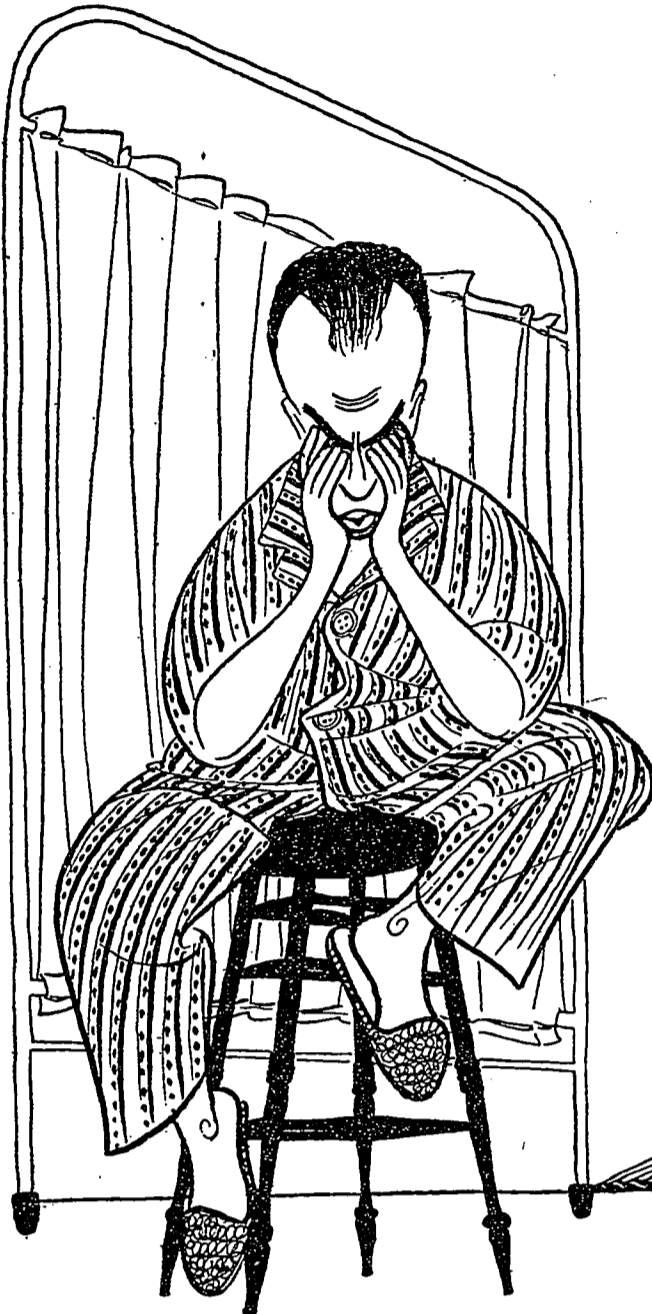
In Horton Foote's "The Trip to Bountiful," Lillian Gish is giving the finest performance of her career. Although the play as a whole is introverted, Mr. Foote has created some vital characters out of the raw materials of life, and he has also involved them in a situation that evokes emotional responses. Miss Gish plays the part of an impoverished widow who has to live with a hateful daughter-in-law and who dreams of returning to her childhood home, Bountiful, where she was happy.

As literature "The Trip to Bountiful" is a little like those folk plays of a quarter of a century ago in which the author added nothing to the characters and situation. Picturesque natives were supposed to be enough. Mr. Foote has many admirable qualities as a writer, but he is impersonal and withdrawn; and "The Trip to Bountiful" is more like a prose narrative than a piece for the theatre.

Illuminating a Part
That may be less important than the fact that it provides Miss Gish with the most substantial part she has had for years. She makes something moving and memorable out of it. On the surface, the widow is a pallid character. The externals are humdrum enough: drab attire, tired shoulders, meek, almost anxious acceptance of the humiliating place in life that she has drifted into.

But out of the incomparable awareness that has always distinguished her acting, Miss Gish has found the unconquerable spirit of a rejected old lady whose mind is still alert. From the moment when the curtain discovers her in the first act, rocking in her chair silently but fiercely, you know that she is teeming with life and you are not surprised by the quickness of her wits when she finally escapes from home. The glow of relief that takes possession of her when she gets on the bus, the homely rush of her conversation, the warmth she has for the people she meets in passing are positive qualities of a rare character. She is a wonderful old lady, largely because Miss Gish has insight into the human spirit and also has a freshness and purity of her own.

The performance of "The Trip to Bountiful" has been directed with notable integrity by Vincent J. Donehue. In the part of the veiled daughter-in-law, Jo Van Fleet gives a vivid, richly documented performance that catches every



José Ferrer, depicted by Mr. Hirschfeld, as the leading player in, l. to r., "The Shrike," opening at the civic playhouse on Nov. 25; "Cyrano de Bergerac," the current attraction; "Richard III," beginning Dec. 9, and "Charley's Aunt," Dec. 23.

OPENINGS OF THE WEEK

ESCAPADE—Wednesday at the Forty-eighth Street. A comedy by Roger MacDougall, starring Brian Aherne and Ursula Jeans. Melville Cooper and Roddy McDowall are featured. Opening night curtain: 8.

TEATRO ESPANOL COMPANY—Thursday at the Broadhurst. A Spanish repertory group, headed by Alejandro Ulloa. The first bill will be "Don Juan Tenorio," by José Zorrilla. Opening night curtain: 8.

of the character. Last March, Miss Van Fleet gave an equally vivid performance of an entirely different character—Camille in "Camino Real." Like Miss Gish, she is not limited to the externals of a part.

After being homeless for several seasons, Josephine Hull has taken up permanent quarters in "The Solid Gold Cadillac," by Howard Teichmann and George S. Kaufman. At the moment she is a small stockholder who asks some awkward questions of the highly paid directors of a giant corporation at the annual meeting. To take her off their necks, the directors offer her a job in the corporation office where, by being innocent, honest and motherly, she foment a revolution.

Satirical Beginning

As a play "The Solid Gold Cadillac" is second-rate Kaufman, wherever it may stand on Mr. Teichmann's list. It begins like a satire on big business and big business in government—which are subjects as profitable as the ones Mr. Kaufman helped to calumniate with raucous gaiety in the Thirties. After a pungent beginning, however, "The Solid Gold Cadillac" relapses into heter-skelter fooling that never really comes to grips with anything. It is devastating in manner but impoverished in wit.

Mrs. Hull, who is a chunky, kindly soul with the manners of a lady, comes through the furor triumphantly. Although deeply involved in the knavery of big business, she always looks as though she might step into a kitchen at any moment. In a number of scenes with Loring Smith, who is pretty

MAN AND WIFE IN "ESCAPADE"



Brian Aherne, as a militant pacifist, with Ursula Jeans in the comedy which opens Wednesday at the Forty-eighth Street Theatre.

GOSSIP OF THE RIALTO

The Playwrights Company Contemplates Next Script—Plan Awry—Items

By LEWIS FUNKE

THERE is news this morning to set astir once again the hearts of sundry swains. For, it appears, Audrey Hepburn, who conquered Broadway in "Gigi," her first American appearance, and then went on to win Hollywood for her portrayal of the romantic princess in "Roman Holiday," finally has made up her mind about the next play she would like to do. It is "Undine," by the late French playwright Jean Giraudoux, and, quite naturally, the Playwrights Company would be more than pleased to oblige the lady. In fact, with "Tea and Sympathy" and "Sabrina Fair" already launched, the Playwrights are in the clear to plan a production after the first of the year.

Before specific plans can be made, however, one major problem must be solved: M. Giraudoux, more than a decade back, entered

into a contract with Schuyler Watts, whereby Mr. Watts was able to do the English dramatization of the play. Not so long ago, Maurice Valency, who had adapted from Giraudoux, "The Madwoman of Chailloot" and "The Enchanted," also did the same for "Undine." Mr. Watts asserts that through his contract, he alone has the English-speaking stage rights to "Undine." But it is the Valency version the Playwrights would like to do. To avert this end, negotiations with Mr. Watts are now in progress. Mr. Watts, by the way, thinks Miss Hepburn would be "most lovely" in the role.

FLOODED: Old Man Noah and his Ark, by one of those strange quirks—miracle, if you prefer, suddenly seems to be operating on both sides of the Atlantic. Not so long ago, Clifford Odets was revealing that his latest play, "The Flowering Peach," scheduled to have its premiere this winter, had as its subject, Noah, his ark, his wife, his three sons and their wives, as well as those miserable souls who missed the boat. Now, the London scout arrives with word that Peter Ustinov's latest "No Sign of the Dove," due in the West End in a month or so, also stems from the Flood. But, before anyone starts pointing fingers, let it be quickly explained that there is a difference.

When Mr. Odets was asked whether there was any parallel to be drawn from his play for modern life, he stoutly declared, "The Flowering Peach" definitely is not a Biblical allegory, nor a folk play, but one about intense family life in which the people are real and human." Mr. Ustinov's "Dove," on the other hand, is described as a modern morality in which Miles Malleon plays a modern Noah, "an old man in his early hundreds." The scene is a large rococo house in which the action shifts from a "Venetian Room on the ground floor to a rotunda with a number of bedrooms opening onto it—rather like a French farce," according to Mr. Ustinov, who clearly is once more in one of those "The Love of Four Colonels" moods.

Similar Drives

Much of what one may say of the dramatic aspirant is true of other young artists. Certainly the drives which turn a young person from the world as it is to a better one, a world of dream and hope, ideal and art, are similar. But the theatre artist necessarily presents along with his art more of his personal self, his idiosyncrasies and peculiarities as well as his shining assets. To everything he does on stage, the theatre artist brings not only his emotional and imaginative potential, but habits—sometimes good, often bad—of voice and speech, posture, walk and gesture. If these qualities fit a part he may be lucky. If they fit many he's even luckier. But if the body belie the voice, or the speech pattern belie the carriage or either betray a character, he's lost. He

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SHOWS TODAY

MATINEE—End As a Man, Cyrano de Bergerac, Gently Does It, Guys and Dolls, Porgy and Bess, The Fifth Season and The World of Sholom Aleichem. **EVENING**—The above plus Kind Sir, South Pacific and Me and Juliet (Actors' Fund benefit).

"Death of a Salesman" garnered wide praise, had any qualms about being remembered on Broadway after his long absence in Hollywood, they should be at rest now. Mr. North, it is learned, has been commissioned to compose the scores for both the City Center's forthcoming production of "Richard III" and the new Phoenix Theatre's "Coriolanus." And, everything coming together, as usual, he has been approached by Billy Rose on doing the score for Mr. Rose's contemplated sponsorship of "The Immoralist," the Ruth and Augustus Goetz adaptation from Gide.

ROUND-UP: Producers Theatre (Robert Whitehead, Roger L. Stevens and Robert W. Dowling) will be the importer of T. S. Eliot's "The Confidential Clerk." It's to open in early February at the Morocco with Ina Claire and Claude Rains. . . . Producers Theatre swings into action with its initial production, Liam O'Brien's "The Family Man," at the Coronet, Dec. 26. . . . George Axelrod decided to delay production of his new comedy, "Phffft," subtitled "The Heartwarming Chronicle of a Happy Divorce." . . . Harold Arlen has agreed to compose the score for Truman Capote's new musical play, "House of Flowers," due next season. . . . Burton Lane no longer is the composer for "By the Beautiful Sea," in which Shirley Booth is to appear. . . . Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein 2d and John Steinbeck will form a combination for a musical based on the novelist's sequel to "Cannery Row," to be published soon.

OF SIZE AND SCOPE

The Wide Screen Viewed in the Light of 'How to Marry a Millionaire'

By BOSLEY CROWTHER

ONE thing is proved beyond question about the nature of CinemaScope with its second and milder demonstration in "How to Marry a Millionaire." The giant panel screen is without equal as a surface on which to display the casually recumbent figure of the temptatious Marilyn Monroe. Thirty-odd feet of the blond charmer stretched out on a forty-foot chaise longue, purring stereophonic sweet nothings into a three-foot telephone, is an eye-filling sight which suits for size, and to that extent, any how, warrants this gigantic way of showing films.

There are other testimonies to the virtue of the mammoth rectangular screen to be had in this second outsized picture, now on view at Loew's State and the Globe. Some shots of La Guardia Airport and of the New York skyline from various points of view—and in color, of course—are sensational as straight panoramic displays. They are almost (but not quite) as striking as some of the panoramic scenes of the crowded American landscape which "This Is Cinerama" provides.

Average Comedy

But once you have cordially acknowledged the presence of such expanded views in this latest Twentieth Century-Fox trail blazer into the uncertain realm of the giant screen, you have to search awfully closely for anything else to justify the use of such size and proportions for the average story-telling film. And, as much as we tremble to say so, "How to Marry a Millionaire" is one. It is an average wise-cracking comedy, stretched out like a rubber band.

Its traffic consists almost entirely in the moving about of three sleek dames—Lauren Bacall, Betty Grable and the aforementioned Miss Monroe—in violent pursuit of wealthy husbands into whom they can sink their greedy claws. Even though not too smart about it, they are cold and calculating in their resolve, operating from a New York apartment as they work as models by day. Miss Grable pursues a likely sucker all the way to his hunting lodge in Maine. Miss Bacall tries to snag a Texas oil man and Miss Monroe hits a phony tycoon. But, of course, they all end up married to three other clean-cut, younger guys, only two of whom happen, by mere chance, to turn out to be money-bags.

It is not an unfunny little fable, some of the boners of the girls amuse, such as the notion of Miss Grable that she is going to an Elks convention when she goes to a gentleman's lodge. The repartee, penned by Nunnally Johnson, with a nod to a couple of plays (one of which was "The Greeks Had a Word for It"), pulls frequent chuckles and a few guffaws. William Powell, Fred Clark, Cameron Mitchell and David Wayne do well as assorted males. And Miss Grable, at least, shows some talent for this old brand of farce comedy.

Face it: But the movie men may as well face it: this sort of thing on the giant screen, with its sides to be filled with more than settings and the patter of little verbal feats, is sure to appear frail and trivial when the novelty of bigness wears off. As much as Director Jean Negulesco has here moved his people around, he has not overcome the inevitable and oppressive embarrassment of space. It is like a small party for little children in the grand ballroom of a big hotel. Such a thing is not physically impossible, but it is inappropriate and gauche. The oft-mentioned recommendation that the wide screen is "just like the stage" betrays a complete misunderstanding of cinema and how it works. Space may be wholly advantageous for certain atmospheric films or spectacles, but it is far from essential—or even desirable—for the artful weaving of a closely fashioned tale. Some of the finest achievements of motion-picture art come from the skillful arrangement of selected images within the significant limits of a harmonious frame. The magical paradox of movies is that scope is not a matter of size. Infinite range of observation may be caught in a single close-up view.

This is not to say that great advantage for telling certain tales may not be found in adopting the wide screen. And this is not to say, either, that the present conventional screen is the best to be had. But it is to say that the proportions of CinemaScope are demonstrably extreme, and that something more is needed to recommend its acceptance as a standard than the mere magnification of Miss Monroe.

SPANISH REPERTORY PLAYERS



Alejandro Ulloa and Francisca Ferrandiz in "Don Juan Tenorio," the play by José Zorrilla, opening on Thursday at the Broadhurst.