

NOVEMBER 5, 1939

Miss Katharine Cornell Returning to Chicago After 2½ Year Absence

By Cecil Smith.

AFTER an unwelcome absence of nearly two and a half years, Katharine Cornell, one of the undisputed first ladies of the American stage, returns to our midst tomorrow evening at the Harris theater in S. N. Behrman's comedy bearing the quizzical title, "No Time for Comedy."

In her last engagement here, in May, 1937, Miss Cornell appeared in a two play repertory consisting of Maxwell Anderson's "Wingless Victory" and George Bernard Shaw's "Candida." In the first of these, which nobody thought to be Mr. Anderson's most successful drama, she scored a personal triumph over an intractable script with her arresting portrait of a Malay woman uncomfortably transplanted to New England. When it came to "Candida" there was, of course, little debate over the play at this late date, but there was a great deal of the inevitable discussion this modern classic always arouses as to whether or not the actress was a satisfactory heroine. I thought she was, and now think so all the more strongly in the light of at least one subsequent performance of the moot rôle.

A great deal happens in two years and a half. Two later works by Maxwell Anderson—"The Star Wagon" and "Knickerbocker Holiday"—have been presented here professionally since May, 1937. And the volatile "Candida" has returned to life once more in this period. What has Miss Cornell been doing with her time for 30 months past?

To begin with, she continued on tour with her two plays for a month or so after the close of her Chicago engagement. Then, for the first time in a number of years, she decided to take an extended rest. She had not intended to stop work at all. Indeed, a world tour, to occupy a year, had been planned. But the combination of unsettled world conditions and the tragic death in an airplane accident of Ray Henderson, her brilliant advance representative for the tour, led Miss Cornell and her producer-husband, Guthrie McClintic, to abandon the idea altogether.

Month followed month, until 16 had passed. Unable to endure inactivity any longer, Miss Cornell set out to prepare "Herod and Miriamne," a translation of a German romantic play upon biblical subject matter. A brief tour of such "key cities" as Pittsburgh, Buffalo, and Detroit revealed "Herod and Miriamne" as too weak an aspirant to contend with Broadway competition. With costly nonchalance Miss Cornell and Mr. McClintic tossed it aside.

As luck would have it, S. N. Behrman at just this time was looking for an actress to play the heroine of his newly completed "No Time for Comedy." Miss Cornell read it during her darkest moments with the sober-sided "Herod and Miriamne," and promptly started the wires to buzzing between Detroit and New York. After a few weeks of study and rehearsal, "No Time for Comedy" (Continued on Page 2.)



Here's Deanna Durbin looking terribly grown-up and awfully pretty in this new photograph, recently received from Hollywood. In her latest screen opus, "First Love," she experiences her first screen romance. It's at the Palace theater.



Newest Saroyan Play Hailed as Masterpiece by Drama Followers

By Burns Mantle.

NEW YORK.—I see by our local papers that William Saroyan, who was one of the freaks of the theater a year ago, is now on his way to becoming one of its pets. His newest play, a study of character in a San Francisco bar-room called "The Time of Your Life," is hailed as a masterpiece of entertainment if not of construction, and all the Saroyans are being happy tossing about assorted "I told you so's."

Mr. Saroyan, to go a bit deeper into the history of his rise and triumph, is the gifted young Armenian, California born, who acquired a cult by writing a series of unusual short stories, the most quoted of which was called "The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze."

Tiring of the adulation his literary success brought him, young William restlessly sought a new world to conquer in the theater. He wrote a fanciful one-act drama entitled "My Heart's in the Highlands." It was produced experimentally by the Group theater last spring, and received with such an assortment of bricks and bouquets as to fill the Broadway haunts with gossip for a week. Then the Theater guild took it up and it ran out a subscription period. This saved the guild the embarrassment of finding another play for its subscribers, who had been promised six premières a season.

The only thing I liked about "My Heart's in the Highlands" was the title, and Robert Burns wrote that. As entertainment in the theater, sold at Broadway theater tariffs, it was, I insisted, a cheat. The day after this opinion was printed I had a wire from Mr. Saroyan saying: "Wait until it starts to haunt you. I felt the same way about it until I began to remember it. I hope you will see it again some time, because I'm pretty sure it's not goofy, but good and great. Many thanks anyhow."

"My Heart's in the Highlands" did not haunt anybody very long, but before it was withdrawn Mr. Saroyan had practically finished his second play. This turned out to be "The Time of Your Life," which we have with us now.

It is a strange play, but not nearly so goofy nor so defiant of established play forms as was "My Heart's in the Highlands." The heart of the author in this instance is in Pacific street at the foot of the Embarcadero in San Francisco. Here his friend Nick runs a restaurant and entertainment place into which the human drift is heavy and picturesque and the questioning of (Continued on Page 2.)



Left: Katharine Cornell will open a three weeks' engagement at the Harris theater tomorrow night in a new comedy by S. N. Behrman, known for good reasons as "No Time for Comedy."

(Vandamm Photo.)

Above: Wonder what it is that seems to be frightening Bob Hope and Paulette Goddard so much? You can find out for yourself when you see "The Cat and the Canary," now showing on the Chicago theater screen.