

Mantle Finds Artificial Drama Is Theater's Chief Handicap

Movies Have Sounded Its Death Knell

Audiences Won't Pay Dearly for Second Rate Films Given Cheaply.

By Burns Mantle.

NEW YORK.—[Special.]—It is a good thing to take yourself away from the scene of your routine labors occasionally. Freshens the observation. I have just given several days to dashing westward to tell the students of Dean Williams' school of journalism at the University of Missouri something about the eastern theater, and am back to find my own students, or sections of them, quite madly excited about an American ballet, among other things.

Who ever expected that would happen? We have always looked upon the ballet as something quite un-American as a dance form. In that sense it still is. But we lose sight of the fact that what used to be un-American is fast becoming all-American, and all-American is an inclusive term expressing the normal reactions of many racial groups.

This American ballet, organized and subsidized, I hear, by a youthful patron of the arts, Edward Warburg, naturally stems from the classic French model, as adapted and perfected by the Russians. But it also includes a touch of American dash and gusto, and more than a touch of American frankness in clowning and spirit. Thus it draws an all-American audience together and sets it cheering.

"Alma Mater" Terpsichorean Razz of Football.

I could not tell you whether it is good ballet or just average. I am sure it is quite likely to improve. Our dancers, foreign born some of them, the children of foreign born parents many of them, seem still a bit heavy on their feet, due, perhaps, to that old Rotarian slogan warning youth to keep its feet on the ground. The impression of floating through space the Russians give with their more fluent technic still eludes our dancers, it seems to me.

But they do amazingly well in imitation of their models, and are especially amusing and entertaining in such narrative ballets as one called "Alma Mater," a spoofing of college football as it is fictionalized and first-paged during the fall of the year. Mr. Warburg furnished the libretto for this and the score was written by Kay Swift, a young woman who provided the music for Joe Cook's "Fine and Dandy," and wrote the song "Can't We Be Friends" for Libby Holman. There is something frankly American about that combination.

Make Believe on Legitimate Stage Vigorously Protested.

I also come back with the conviction strengthened that the artificial drama, the palpably made entertainment, is currently the legitimate theater's greatest handicap. That and the cost of it, particularly in the western country that has become so definitely movie-minded these last fifteen years.

The same audience that will accept the most flagrant make believe dramas on the screen without a pro-



"THE LITTLE COLONEL"

Hello, honey! So you are a little colonel now! Yes—It's Shirley Temple, who is appearing in the title role of "The Little Colonel." Would an army lie down and die for her! Chicago.

German Operetta

A VIENNESE operetta called "Der Vogelhaender" ("The Bird Peddler"), by Carl Zeller, will be presented by the "Germania Broadcast" for the benefit of the German Old People's home on Sunday night, April 7, in the Civic Opera house. William L. Klein, who last year presented "Gypsy Love" and "Die Fledermaus" under the same auspices, will engage the best German opera singers in the middle west.

There have been three dramas produced since I went away. No one of them has turned out very well, because there is no particular reason why any one of them should have been produced in the first place. The best of the three is a pleasant little comedy called "The Bishop Misbehaves," which John Golden [in Florida] left for his producing staff to play with while he was away.

Walter Connelly Makes an Engaging Bishop.

The bishop in this case is Walter Connelly, one of the more popular of the interchangeable stars between screen and stage. Walter, grown fat

as any bishop, and being a likable as well as a gifted comedian, has the role of an English cleric who seeks rest and relaxation reading detective stories.

Therefore when he, with his sister, dashes into a pub in England to escape a rainstorm and finds that he has followed closely upon a holdup, he is greatly thrilled and a little excited. Immediately the bishop goes searching for clues and finds them. Also finds the jewels that were later to have been picked up by the crooks. He takes the jewels and leaves his card.

When the crooks visit the rectory to force a return of their swag, and also help themselves to the gold service of the rectory, the bishop locks them in a handy vault and dictates his own terms.

Here is a pleasant story and a warming performance by Mr. Connelly. But not enough entertainment, nor enough better entertainment than the screen offers, to make up the difference in cost.

Louis Bromfield Transplants French Play to New England.

A second drama is more serious. "Times Have Changed," it is called. It was adapted from the French of Edouard Bourdet by the American novelist Louis Bromfield. Bromfield, as Sidney Howard did with "The Late Christopher Bean," has changed the locale to New England and offers his story as that of the Pentlands, one of the older and prouder families of the Massachusetts hill towns. The Pentlands are facing a crash. To keep all the family stock under family control Forbes Pentland decides to make up an old quarrel with Harry, his brother, who has married a French actress and further disgusted the family by living happily with her.

Still the crash comes. Now it is proposed to marry Harry Pentland's daughter, Marienne, to the wealthy half-wit son of another fine old New England family, and thus bolster the Pentland credit. The girl, lured by the possibility of riches and jewels, submits to the ceremony, is disgusted with the adventure that follows,

and is hopelessly sunk when it is learned that the fortune she had married to control has also been swept away.

In the current ending the Pentlands take their beating and the half-wit husband happily finds the courage to shoot himself. But nothing in the way of convincing drama, save in the acting of detached scenes, has been produced to make the entertainment worth its cost.

"Distant Shore" Dramatizes Crippen Murder Case of 1910.

After playing Utah Heep with such great success in the screened "Der Copperfield" it probably was not difficult to persuade Roland Young to come east and take up the role of Dr. Bond in a piece called "The Distant Shore." This is a dramatization of the Crippen murder case of 1910, and the reticent Mr. Young is cast as the pathetic little doctor who killed his loud and shrill wife and ran away with his sympathetic secretary.

Here again the acting is excellent, and the story value good. Dr. Bond is pictured as an abused nature's nobleman who either accidentally or deliberately slipped his impossible missus an extra sleeping powder and, when she died, buried her in the cellar.

The neighbors talk and the police investigate. The doctor grows panicky and confesses to the stenographer. He still is not sure that he really meant to kill his wife, but there she is, under the bricks, and the police are closing in. The girl insists upon sharing the dangers of an escape. The two get to England and start for Montreal, with the girl dressed as a boy.

They never reach that distant shore of Canada. Signor Marconi's wireless, a new thing then, reaches out through the air and they are discovered and returned to England.

"Barretts of Wimpole Street" and "Green Pastures" Booming.

A good little drama in the main, but not good enough, I fear. It, too, is the sort of thing that adds up better in terms of the picture drama. Mr. Young is a gentle and persuasive soul seeking happiness, and Sylvia Field is his loyal love.

I find the town's two favorite revivals booming along encouragingly. "The Green Pastures" after five years, is as good as new and much more popular. Miss Cornell's return to "The Barretts of Wimpole Street" is also pleasing to her public. Brian Aherne is back in his old part of Browning and giving the same electrifying performance he gave originally. It is a role cut exactly to the measure of his surest talent.

Comic Opera Singers Are on Way Here

Due Next Week, to Give Classical Light Works Brought Up to Date.

By Edward Moore.

THE Opera Comique, coming to the Auditorium next week for a fortnight, looks in advance as though it were filling a place of its own in the field of music and thereby performing duties of a kind not found elsewhere on this side of the ocean.

That place and those duties are the presentation of classical light operas adapted and brought down to date and, one is permitted to hope, in terms of the theater of 1935. This has been the lack in seasons of serious opera. It is true that major opera companies occasionally include works of a lighter character in their repertoires, Smetana's "Bartered Bride," Mozart's "Marriage of Figaro," and the like, but except in the most occasional instances one is at once aware of the change of pace and essential differences of cast. Such matter becomes glaringly apparent.

Little Known Outside New York Despite Eight Years' Existence.

Here is a company that proposes to deal with works of swift pace and light comedy line. The organization has been in existence for eight years, first under the name of the Little Opera company of Brooklyn, later as the Opera Comique of New York. It has been little known outside of New York, and even there was familiar only to those vitally interested. But during this time it has quietly and with little attempt at publicizing worked out a repertoire of some thirty works.

It has sought American talent, and it has retranslated and adapted librettos so that they may be presented in up to date English. Only the enchanting melodies of the old works have been preserved. They do not need reconstruction; in fact, any such attempt would be tampering with fate. So it is discovered that the first attraction, "La Vie Parisienne," is by that old master of light music, Jacques Offenbach, but that it will be music to a wholly understandable play in English. That another Offenbach work, formerly known as "The Tales of Hoffman," is to be presented here under the name of "The Dancing Doll," and that "The Gay Deceiver" is none other than our old friend, "The Bat," all dressed up with a new book.

Singers Are Americans Peculiarly Fitted to Light Opera.

All this unending work and rehearsal has accumulated a notable star of leaders. Kendall K. Mussey is the general director. Dr. Ernest Knoch, who has waved many a potent operatic baton here and elsewhere, is the musical director. Jacob Schwartzkopf is conductor. Ernest Otto, long with Max Reinhardt, is the stage director; Edwin Strawbridge, a well known dancer, is ballet master. These names give a slight idea of the intents and aims of the Opera Comique.

Given a book that is singable in the vernacular, the company has proceeded on the theory that the

"SOCIETY DOCTOR"

There are smiles that make you happy—and this is one of them. Miss Virginia Bruce posing. She is playing in "Society Doctor," Apollo.



Notes from Filmland

George O'Brien made a personal appearance at the premiere of his new film, "When a Man's a Man," in San Francisco. His leading lady in the film, Dorothy Wilson, was in town, playing in the "Merrily We Roll Along" company; so, grabbing a taxi, George got her from her theater and brought her to the opening of the film to take a bow, returning her to her own show in time for the curtain.

Sally Eilers has had two lucky breaks with lost articles in recent weeks; one, having a pocketbookful of valuables and money lost and returned by a newsboy who rode eight miles on a bicycle across town to return it; another, when her diamond

bracelet, lost at a dinner-dance, was returned by the janitor who swept up after the party. You can't tell Sally the world isn't honest.

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