

# Group Theater Makes Chicago Debut with Play by Odets

## Band of Hope Becomes Rival of the Guild

"Awake and Sing" Brings Company Here After Five Years in New York.

By Charles Collins.

THE Group theater of New York will introduce itself to Chicago tomorrow night at the Selwyn, with Clifford Odets' drama, "Awake and Sing," as its medium. This event calls for a historical prolog, for the organization is an interesting manifestation of the spirit of the modern American stage. We have been hearing about the Group—perhaps an unhappy choice of name because it suggests amateurism and little theaterism to the average playgoer—for the last five years. We have been impressed by the fact that it has staged a Pulitzer prize winner ("Men in White"), and we have been informed by much drum-beating that from its ranks there has sprung the star-eyed wonderboy of contemporary playwrights—the author of the work with which it is making its Chicago debut.

An easy way to describe the origin of the Group is to call it an offshoot of the Theater Guild—a temperamental child with ideas of its own which flew off the nest early in its career and surprised its parents by its survival. Another way is to emphasize the Group's groupiness, and to tell how it runs away into the country every summer to lead the communal life and experiment with plays and acting in New England villages. But however arty or groupy or off the main line its way of life may be, the fact remains that its New York record is fairly impressive, and that Broadway drama critics have frequently used their best adjectives in praise of its acting.

Three Dreamers of the Theater Guild.

The movement started inside the Theater Guild's organization with an alliance of theatrical ideals between Harold Clurman, a stage manager, and Lee Strasberg, an actor, both of them young dreamers with talent. Clurman may be called the father of the band. They annexed a young woman of the Theater Guild named Cheryl Crawford, a play reader and casting director. These three are now the directors of the Group Theater, Inc. The trio's first step was to persuade the Theater Guild to throw out a minor tentacle in the form of an experimental studio, where its young geniuses could try out queer-looking manuscripts. The first production of this apprenticeship annex was "Red Rust," a drama from Soviet Russia. Miss Crawford, Clurman, and a new recruit in the stage direction department named Herbert Biberman were the executives of this project; the "Red Rust" cast contained Lee Strasberg, Franchot Tone, Luther Adler, Ruth Nelson, William Challee and Eunice Stoddard. All except Tone are still members of the organization; the latter has gone to Hollywood glory. This happened in December, 1929.

Start with "House of Connelly."

In the summer of 1931 the dreamers, 30 strong, now calling themselves the Group but still under the Theater Guild wing, went off to Brookfield Center, Conn., for twelve weeks of rehearsal in Paul Green's "The House of Connelly." They brought it into New York under Guild auspices and had a run of ten weeks. Then they staged another play out of the Guild's portfolio—"1931" by the Siftons—but it faded out quickly.

A six weeks' tour of eastern cities in "The House of Connelly" followed, and during this pilgrimage the Groupers decided to cut loose from the Guild's apron strings. "Too little common ideology" is the official reason given for this parting. In the spring of 1932 Maxwell Anderson's "Night Over Taos" was staged in New York as the Group's first independent offering. It didn't last long.

In the summer of 1932 they re-



THIS IS THAT FELLOW, JACK HYLTON

Jack Hylton, master of British cabaret and radio entertainment, continues to function in the Gold Coast room of the Drake hotel with his troupe of clever performers. His programs have won great popularity. (Maurice Seymour Photo.)

ed in a village called Dover Furnace and polished up "Success Story," by John Howard Lawson. This brought their first financial success on Broadway with a run of sixteen weeks. Then they staged Dawn Powell's "Big Night" and lost all the "Success Story" profits.

"Men in White"

Brings B'way Success.

Summer of 1933: rehearsals of Sidney Kingsley's "Men in White," at Warrensburg, N. Y. A Broadway premiere in September; an immediate hit; a Pulitzer prize; a sale of film rights, and a run of ten months. Summer of 1934: Ellenville, N. Y. "Gold Eagle Guy" was the subject of their festival celebrations. It was "an experimental effort to interpret a recent American era," according to the Group's mouthpiece. It didn't catch on at the box office. In the course of the run, however, some of the Groupers decided to stage a one act play written by a member. This was Clifford Odets' "Waiting for Lefty," which contains the rabble-rousing oratory and emotional fervor of a labor union meeting when a strike is in the wind. This piece spread over the country like a rash among the radical amateurs.

The Group quickly followed its discovery of Odets by staging his first full length play, "Awake and Sing," and his second, "Till the Day I Die," an anti-Nazi opus, which had "Waiting for Lefty" as its curtain-raiser.

Last summer the Group was deprived of its philosophic meditations and spartan exercises in stagecraft among the cow pastures by the persistence of "Awake and Sing" at the Belasco theater, New York.

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COMING! **GUY LOMBARDO** AND HIS ROYAL CANADIANS HERE MAY 30th!

Their new productions of the season were "Weep for the Virgins," a quick closing affair, and Odets' third full length drama, "Paradise Lost." A stylized dramatization of Theodore Dreiser's "An American Tragedy," called "The Case of Clyde Griffiths," and blaming its hero's sins on capitalism was their latest project.

The Group comes to Chicago in the fifth year of its existence to offer "Awake and Sing" as a sample of its quality. Next season it intends to bring the full acting strength of its organization here.

**BID AU REVOIR TO FREDDY MARTIN**

**LAST TIMES! TED LEWIS**

Coming May 8th

**Sophie Tucker**

and her orchestra—directed by JACK FULTON assisted by TED SHAPIRO

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It is a splendid sound production skillfully handled... a screen epic... a motion picture masterpiece—Meyer Zolotareff. —AMERICAN

## Sophie Tucker Brings Band to Terrace Room

Ben Pollack's Orchestra Comes to Urban Room at Congress Hotel.

SOPHIE TUCKER and her orchestra, directed by Jack Fulton, assisted by Ted Shapiro, will begin an engagement in the Terrace room of the Hotel Morrison next Friday. With her troupe will be the King's Jesters, an attraction at the Terrace room since last October.

Miss Tucker tells the stories of her early career (Circa 1911): "From the German Village, New York, I went to Tony Pastor's, on the Bowery. Then I landed in vaudeville, in blackface, because a manager told me that I had such an ugly face I ought to cover it. "Then Ziegfeld saw me in Holyches, Mass., and put me in the 'Follies.' I stopped the show, but only lasted two nights for the principals weren't keen about my overnight success. I let Ziggy know what I thought of him. "Then to Chicago in 'Louisiana Lou.' What a cast that show had! Trilxie Friganza, Lenora Ulric, a chorus girl; Bernard Granville, and Alexander Carr."

Ben Pollack and his orchestra, featuring Doris Robbins, began an engagement in the Urban room of the Congress hotel last Thursday. During the past winter the band appeared with success at the Roosevelt hotel in New Orleans; the Lowry in St. Paul, and the Hotel Schroeder in Milwaukee.

Last Friday night marked Henry Busse's eighth anniversary as an orchestra director. He leads the band at the Chez Paree. Harry Hochman, who is starring there, presented him with a platinum, diamond studded baton. . . . Richmond has added a new entertainer to his revue—a ventriloquist named Edgar Bergen. Also appearing with Richmond are the D'Ivons,

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## IN FRENCH REVUE AT THE PALACE

Arline D'Ormond appears in the "Folies Comiques," a variety revue in the French style which is the current stage entertainment at the Palace theater. This blend of songs, dances and chorus girls is fresh from the producer's hands, and may remain at the Palace for several weeks. (Murray Korman Photo.)



whose engagement is their first in Chicago. Both are expert ballet dancers. All of their music is especially written. They are husband and wife.

As a farewell party for Freddy Martin, who leaves the Aragon next Thursday, a celebration will be held tomorrow with both Kay Kyser and Freddy Martin and their orchestras on the bandstand. This will mark the first north side appearance of Kay Kyser. During Freddy Martin's absence, the Aragon will present Griff Williams.

west coast maestro, whose Chicago debut will take place next Saturday.

"Dance Tea," a new Sunday afternoon feature, will be inaugurated today in the Continental room of the Stevens hotel. Ramon and Renita, dancers, and Xavier Cugat and his orchestra are now appearing nightly in the Continental room. They will perform informally at these Sunday teas.

Helene Carol, a young dancer who won praise when she re-

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## Stage Letter Box

OF THE dramatic editor:

Chicago, April 27.—The Salvatore brothers, producers of the late "From Out of the Darkness," are now peacefully at work and will pay back every investor in due time. They had a great experience in the theatrical producing field; they learned plenty of its amazing tricks, and in the fall, if their plans mature, they will once again sponsor another production.

Immediately after arrangements are completed for backing, one of the boys will go to California and try to lure some "big game" into taking the lead, at any salary, just so they can secure her. At least

\$25,000 will go into the production of this new play, which the young author (Paul) is now working on. ADOLPH SALVATORE.

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—Heywood Brown

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MON. EVE.—Sylphides, Tricorne, Aurora's Wedding, JULES, EVE.—Public Gardens, Scheherazade, Chocartum, FINAL PERFORMANCE WED. EVE.—Bolshoi Fantastique, Chocartum, Spectre de La Rose, Beau Danube.

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