

KAFFEE KLATSCH

In "Cafe Crown" the characters wander in search of a plot. A poor comedy about a rich Yiddish legend. . . . Mr. Raphaelson haunts the critics. Reviewed by Alvah Bessie.

IN HIS new play Mr. Kraft has tapped a rich vein of human material in the legendary Cafe Royal on Second Avenue and Twelfth Street, New York, long the scene of backstage intrigue and gossip for actors of the Yiddish theater. For the disguise is purely perfunctory. *Cafe Crown* is certainly the Cafe Royal; Hymie the waiter is certainly Herman the bus-boy, and the famous David Cole cannot be other than the late great actor of the Jewish stage, Jacob P. Adler, whose life gave rise to many legends richer than those related in *Cafe Crown*.

For obvious reasons Mr. Kraft has watered down his material when he has not exploited it. In fact he has not written a play so much as he has gathered a job-lot assortment of queer and amusing and heart-warming people, and let them wander about the stage. Plot there is practically none, suspense is seriously lacking, characterization goes no deeper than the skin. With what is left, Elia Kazan, the director, has done the best he could.

Yet so real are some of these people at moments, and so recognizable, that the audience frequently has a good time in spite of some really atrocious theater writing and a "drama" that slops along when it does not fall flat on its face. Some of Mr. Kraft's people are very funny; many of his gags are good, but the whole thing takes on less of the aspect of life than of a burlesque version of life, gagged and hoked to the eyebrows.

The great David Cole, actor in the grand manner, has not graced the stage in five long years. His activities have been confined to directing, when he has been active at all. Now he reappears with a play in his pocket that he wants to mount, and he tells the story of it to his partner Hymie, the waiter-proprietor of the Cafe. Hymie is willing to put up the money as long as it isn't Shakespeare, which he contends never pays. That's part of the plot.

The other part deals with David Cole's generation of children, who are deserting the Yiddish stage for Broadway and Hollywood. His daughter is on Broadway; his wife is about to play in Flatbush; his prospective son-in-law is flirting with a Hollywood contract, and the old man's soul is ravaged. He has convictions; he wants to give his people the best possible theater; he despises Broadway and Hollywood with their cheap, cardboard success.

The conflict that follows involves David Cole's successful fight with the fleshpots. He's something of a ham himself, and you can never tell when he means what he says and

when he is engaging in his profession offstage. He wins the day, but in a manner that is purely mechanical, purely contrived, and carries no conviction—the worn-out device of a "change of heart."

It is too bad that Mr. Kraft saw these people as quaint and humorous rather than deeply human and rich in deeper intimations. His cardplayers and kibitzers, his idealistic stagehand, his waiter-entrepreneur, his frustrated playwright, and his critic, all demand deeper exploration—delving that would have uncovered real truths about people who are, in life, less special than they are basically human and understandable. This is where the exploitation of milieu and character comes in.

But perhaps Mr. Kraft was not interested in writing a comedy that would have carried serious overtones; he may merely have wanted to entertain. Writers must learn that the most satisfactory entertainment can come only out of deep exploration of the human soul—to be somewhat pompous. Had Mr. Kraft looked further, his play would have been both funnier and more meaningful.

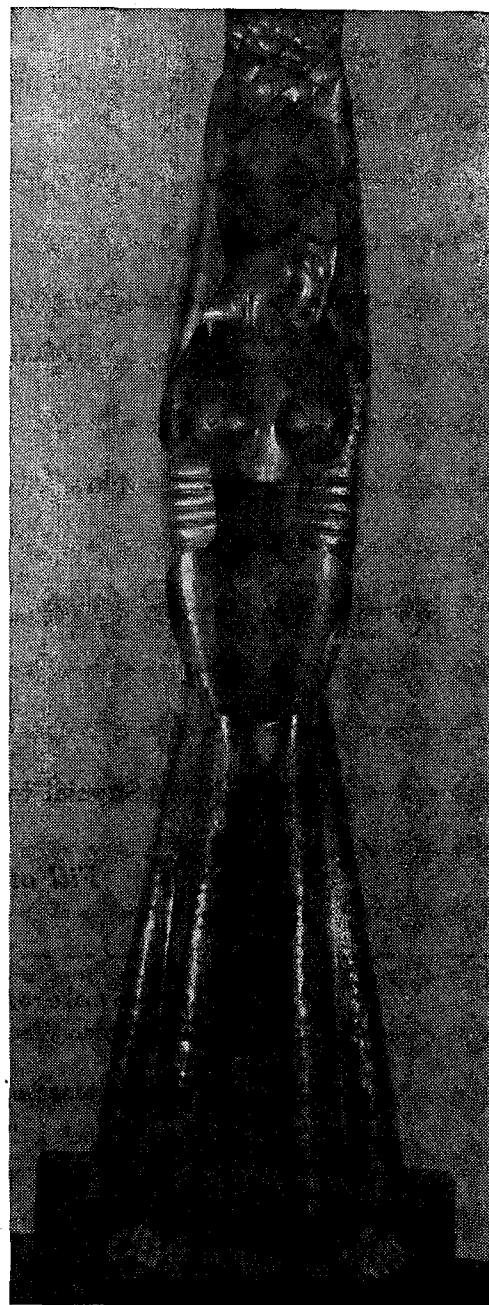
There are many talented people in this play. Sam Jaffe's Hymie is a delight; it has warmth, charm, and much humanity that seems to have been supplied more by the actor than by the playwright. Lou Polan's stagehand is a shrewd and humorous job of acting, and Eduard Franz is creative in the role of the playwright who cannot write unless he does a lot of reading—of other people's plays. The extra waiter of Jay Adler (one of the original clan) has a marvelous insouciance and, as with Mr. Jaffe, we can readily believe he had been a waiter all his life.

In the central role of David Cole, the fine artist that is Morris Carnovsky comes off second best. He fights an uphill battle with a character that is not really written and must depend upon the superficial aspects of the role for what conviction he carries. It is an almost impossibly written character, this David Cole, but I felt that Mr. Carnovsky could have done more with it than he did. He must not be afraid of the role, poorly written as it is. He must look deeper into a human being he must have met many times in the theater and really let himself go. For although David Cole is underwritten, the basic spine of the character is there—not so much in the person of the late Jacob Adler as in a type of human being who is of all time and all countries: the man who has spent too many years looking in a mirror, has been sadly overpraised, and cannot tell himself from someone else.

Cafe Crown could have been a really per-

suasive job of writing and understanding, special as its setting and characters may seem at first glance. In *Cue for Passion*, of a season back, Mr. Kraft wrote a first act that represented real insight into people and their relationships. The people who inhabit the *Crown Cafe* deserved as understanding and as detailed a treatment.

ALVAH BESSIE.



DAWN: Aaron Goodelman's sheet copper sculpture at the ACA Gallery in New York.

PERHAPS there is some truth in the allegations Mr. Samson Raphaelson makes about drama critics in his new play, *Jason*. For all the daily reviewers seem to think he was writing a play about a drama critic, and accordingly, they all make disclaimers. They say, in effect, we don't live in penthouses, dictate our reviews to secretaries, drink sherry before dinner, have show-girl wives; we're not like that at all. None of them seemed to know what Mr. Raphaelson was writing about.

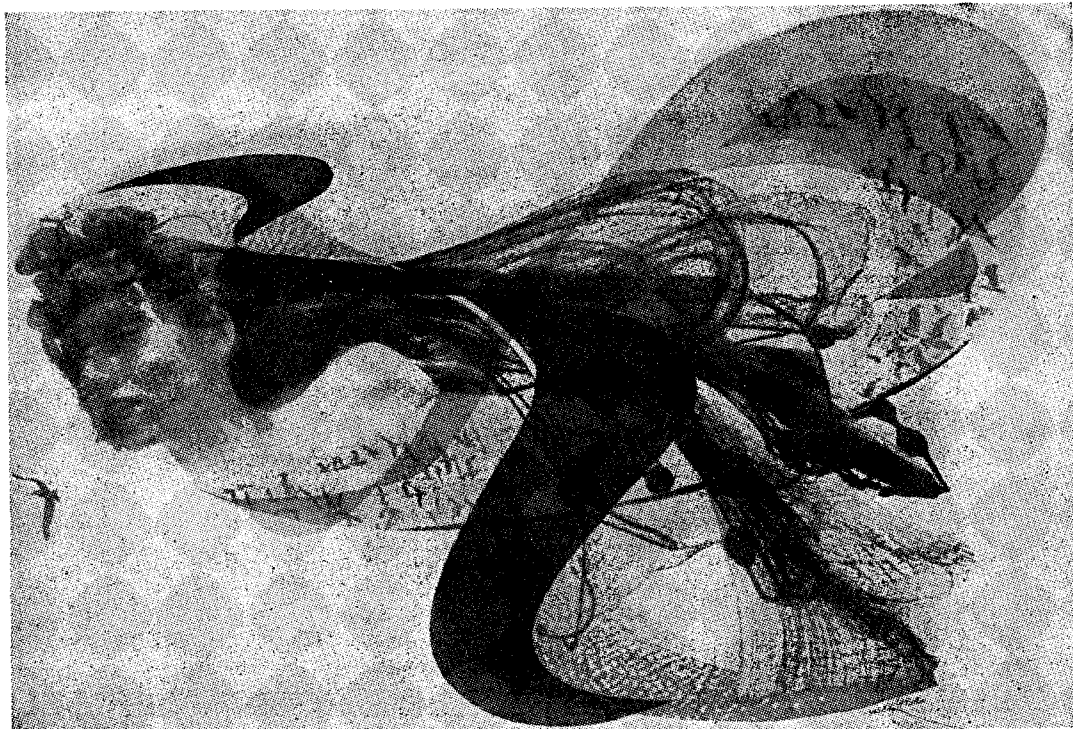
For *Jason* is not a play about a drama critic, even though he is the nominal "hero" of the piece. It is a play about the relationship between the artist, the critic, and the public. Mr. Raphaelson was very courageous to tackle such a problem, for it does not lend itself readily to dramatic treatment. But tackle it he did.

And in order to dramatize the problem, he has placed on the stage a critic who somewhat resembles George J—— N——, a playwright who somewhat resembles W—— S—— (not Shakespeare), the critic's beautiful wife who is busily engaged in concealing her social origin, and a job-lot assortment of other characters, critics, and plain people. Also, Mr. Raphaelson has had recourse to the conventional triangle, and he has not been able to make up his mind whether he is writing farce, satire, drama, high tragedy, or what have you.

THIS MAKES for confusion. It also makes for boredom. His drama critic is a dreadful stuffed shirt (this was intended) who, in contact with the genius that is W—— S——, begins to realize that he lives in a porcelain tower, has no contact with life. The playwright shatters his isolation in several ways, makes love to his wife, forces him to recognize his own realities, breaks his heart, and restores him to himself. Some of this is interesting.

Most of it is not, because Mr. Raphaelson has not gone deeply into his people, has not known how to write them convincingly. Played by Alexander Knox, the critic is a very real human being, and Nicholas Conte does a fine job with the moon-struck playwright. But the issues in which Mr. Raphaelson was interested—the relationship between life, literature, and criticism—do not emerge in terms of the human beings he has chosen to manipulate. There is much talk, little action, less suspense, no real resolution, or final exposition of ideas.

What Mr. Raphaelson might have done with this material, I don't know. What he has done with it is to confuse his audience and himself. He has also, at moments, done a neat job of exposing the pretensions of such "critics" as George J—— N——, who have debased criticism to the level of character assassination; such playwrights as W—— S——, who have deliberately exploited the beauty of human beings for their own purposes. Mr. Raphaelson is on the side of the



HERBERT MATTER'S design, executed originally for the Isaac Goldmann Co.'s calendar, is currently exhibited in the Art and Commerce Show at the Willard Gallery in New York.

people. But they will not find much comfort or enlightenment in this play. A. B.

"Paris Calling"

A new anti-fascist movie thriller ... "Mr. and Mrs. North."

FILM writers and producers, on the whole, are extraordinarily responsive to ideas and headlines. Unfortunately, it is sometimes the wrong sort of response. To some film minds, the French underground struggle against Hitler is not so much a profoundly moving record of human heroism as a peg to hang a picture on, and the picture may very well turn out to be a grotesque like *Paris Calling*. For here is a film dealing with one of the most dramatic subjects of our time, and, what is more, a film alive to some of the political implications of that subject. The aviator hero of *Paris Calling* has been fighting fascism from the beginning; has fought against Franco. The Vichy villain of the film is depicted as the miserable appeaser that he is. Yet this political intelligence and this tremendous subject have been degraded into background for the same old boy-meets-girl plot.

The heroine of *Paris Calling* has three mansions, seven servants, eighteen fur coats, and a Vichyman for a fiance. It takes the death of her mother during a Nazi machine-gun attack on helpless refugees to convince her that fascism must be destroyed. Thereafter she plunges into the underground movement, a rather operatic underground movement which exists largely as a laborious device to bring her to the American aviator's arms. Her adventures include playing the piano in a waterfront cafe, returning to her Vichy

lover as a spy, killing him melodramatically to steal the papers, being surrounded by the Gestapo, and being snatched to safety in a British Commando raid organized for her especial benefit. As a picture of life in the underground movement, this is merely silly; as a thriller, it is too familiar and too slow in pace to excite anyone.

For the actors of *Paris Calling*, as well as the subject, are magnificent. Elizabeth Bergner, who has often been excessively kittenish, is here remarkably subdued and straightforward as the indomitable Marianne, while Basil Rathbone's complacent Vichyman is etched in sulphuric acid. Both make their implausible lines seem momentarily real and honest. Eduardo Ciannelli, mercifully freed from the villainous roles to which he has lately been condemned, stands out as one of the French underground fighters. But the most dynamic performance of all is Lee J. Cobb's. A good many Gestapo officials have appeared on the screen, yet none who, without noise or melodrama, so admirably summed up in one personality everything that we are fighting.

"I WAKE UP SCREAMING" and *Mr. and Mrs. North* have nothing in common except murder. The first is a hard-boiled whodunit of the Dashiell Hammett school; originally a competent detective novel, it has received a screen translation which did violence to the letter but managed to preserve the spirit. With a coherent and unusual plot, clever direction, and one very fine character study, *I Wake Up Screaming* is an unusually good example of its genre.

The murder of a beautiful model begins it, but immediately a series of flashbacks present the model's rise to fame and the entanglements which preceded her death. No screen