

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.

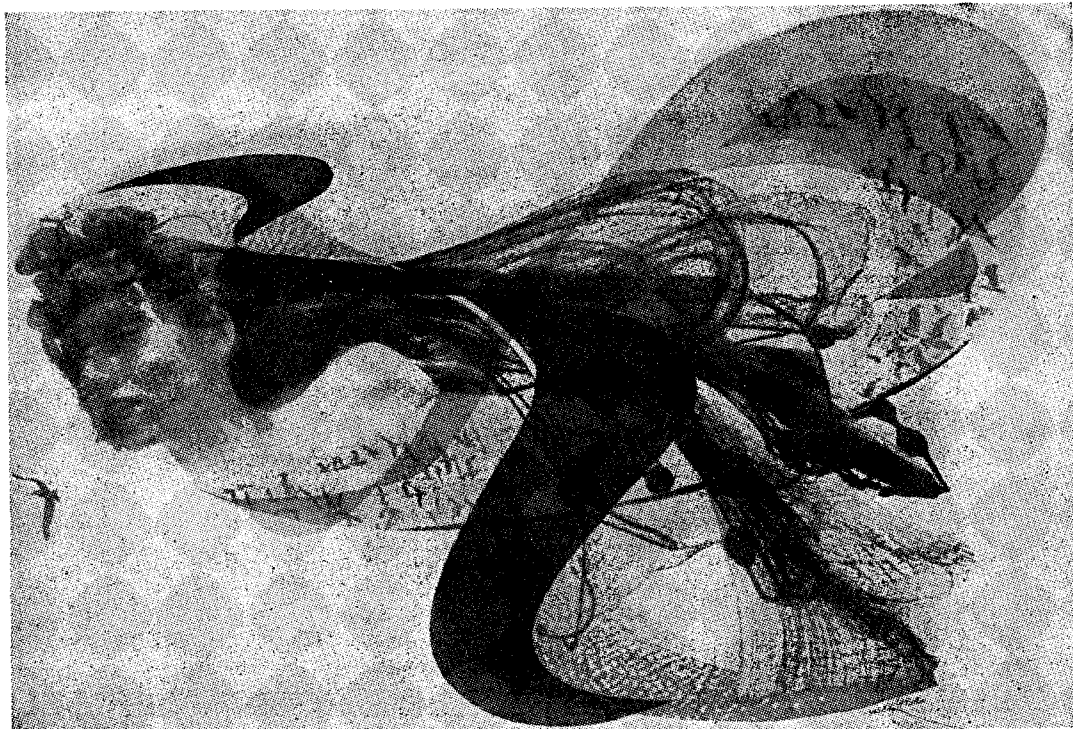
For *Jason* is not a play about a drama critic, even though he is the nominal "hero" of the piece. It is a play about the relationship between the artist, the critic, and the public. Mr. Raphaelson was very courageous to tackle such a problem, for it does not lend itself readily to dramatic treatment.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

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device becomes tedious and sentimental as easily as the flashback, and the speed and force of these are a tribute to the film's direction. As the picture progresses, its emphasis is subtly shifted from the identity of the murderer to the relentless persecution of the chief suspect by a police detective—a soft-voiced, grim giant whose personality dominates the film. And the film's brilliant ending is not a melodramatic struggle with a trapped killer, but the far more profound struggle of the detective's tortured mind.

Nevertheless, the murderer's identity is never obvious, and the suspense of the chief suspect's flight from the police is very great. Perhaps some of the uncertainty is unintentional, for the romantic leads are so badly and unpleasantly acted by Victor Mature and Betty Grable that it is quite possible to suspect them of murder. Carole Landis is hardly more than competent as the girl who was murdered, but she glitters like true gold by the side of Miss Grable; as for Mr. Mature and his leering allure, they go far to justify the film's title. But the performance of Laird Cregar as the hulking detective atones for much of this. Cleverly lighted and photographed, Mr. Cregar gets an extraordinarily sinister quality into a normal face and voice and expression; he is not only terrifying, but human.

In contrast, the chief personality of *Mr. and Mrs. North* is like nothing human. A rather routine mystery plot is enlivened by the world's daffiest heroine, aptly played by Gracie Allen. Mrs. North is the sort of woman who, having brought home her husband to discover a corpse in the closet and undergo a police bombardment, finds him thereafter somewhat distraught and wails, "Oh, darling, you've changed so since you've come home! What's happened?"

Mrs. North, however, does not get murdered, although not only the killer but also her husband and several policemen have adequate motive to strangle her. Mrs. North continues to talk. She is very funny, but there is a little too much of her, and much too little picture to go with her.

JOY DAVIDMAN.

Record Renaissance

New trends on wax. Last year's best discs.

FRANKLY, I can't account for the renaissance of interest in recorded music in the past several months. Perhaps it was the slashing of the retail price of recordings, or maybe the sheer excellence of the newly issued products could not be resisted. At any rate, the recording companies are weeks behind in filling orders.

In their almost frantic desire to capitalize on the situation, the two major recording companies — Victor and Columbia — engaged in unprecedented competition, with duplications of releases occurring too often to be attributed to coincidence. Last April both Victor