



SIGHTS and SOUNDS

"LISTEN, PROFESSOR!"

Peggy Phillips' adaptation of Alexander Afinogenov's play is a warm portrayal of ordinary Soviet life before the war. "A notable occasion." Reviewed by Samuel Sillen.

UNLIKE such adaptations from Soviet plays as *Counterattack* and *The Russian People*, *Listen Professor!* does not deal with the war period. This is in some respects a disadvantage, for the play cannot borrow excitement from events which, even in the barest newspaper statement, have a dramatic impact; the mood is strikingly relaxed by contrast with the life-or-death tension of the battlefield. But the study of a pre-war family has its own advantages which Peggy Phillips explores with great intelligence and skill in her adaptation of Afinogenov's play. By dramatizing, in heart-warming terms, the human values that permeate Soviet life in "normal" times, the play deepens the meaning of the war. For we can explain the quality of the Russians' fight only when we have understood their way of life before the invasion.

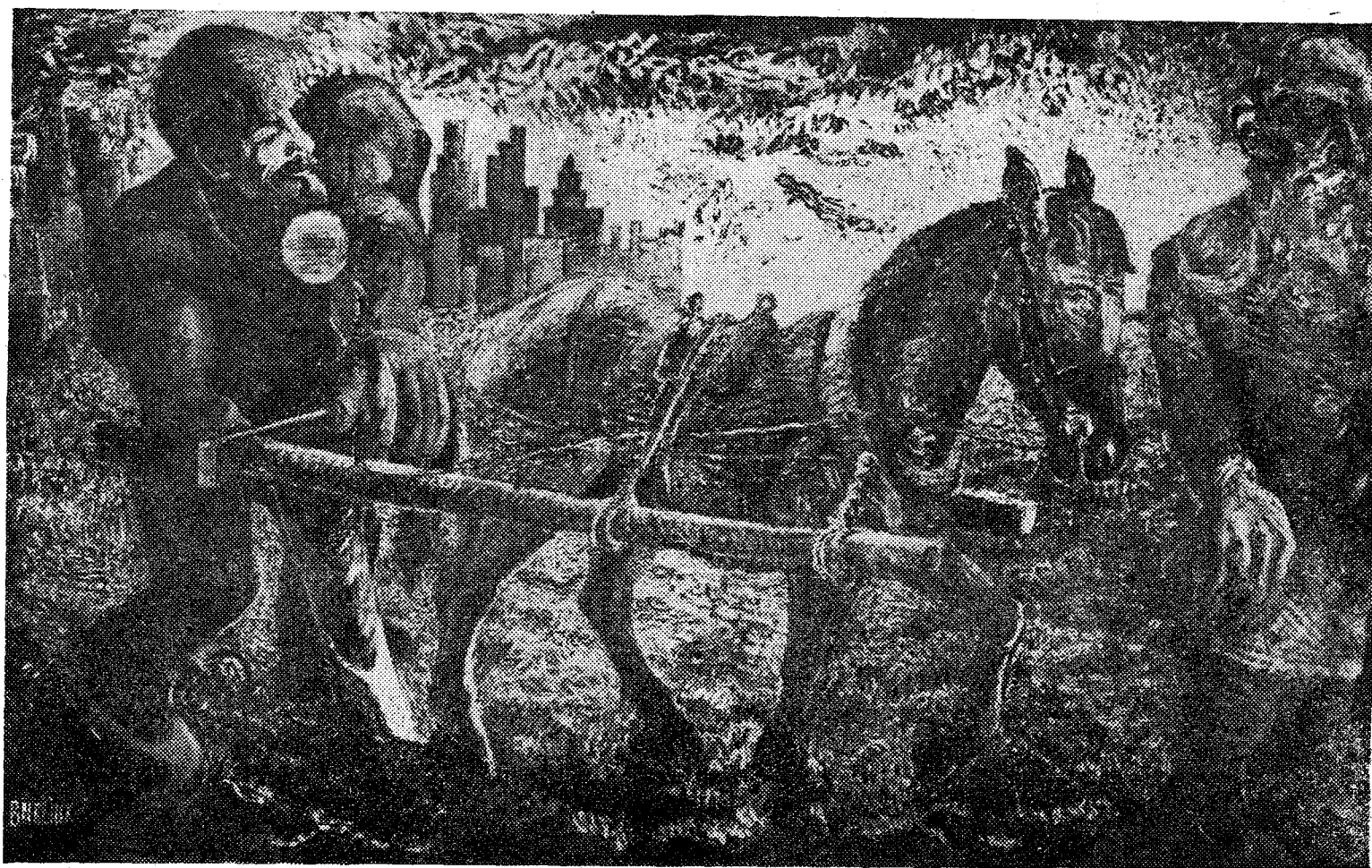
The friendship that develops between

Professor Okayemov and his fifteen-year-old granddaughter is an illuminating experience for both. The old student of manuscripts at first builds a wall between himself and Masha. The trouble is not that his world of books and manuscripts is unimportant—far from it—but that he separates his scholarship from the world of the living. He is unconsciously cruel to Masha, whose capacity for feeling he scarcely suspects. And she in turn cannot realize the wealth of her grandfather's personality until he thaws out in the sunlight which she and her school-friends bring to the house.

THROUGH the professor, Masha's generation feels its kinship with the past. The youngsters, whom the professor begins by resenting, bring him into a living relation to his society that he learns to prize

above all other things. Bridging the two is the middle generation represented by Leonid Karayev, former student of the professor, now an engineer, and Nina, the opera singer whom Leonid loves. All three generations are united at the end in a new comradeship which suggests the organic unity of Soviet life.

The situations are drawn from ordinary life and achieve a simple intimacy that is refreshing after all the *Janies* and *Junior Misses* of our stage. There is great warmth of feeling here which never shades off to sentimentality, because it is always unmistakably authentic. And if we laugh many times during the play, it is never at somebody but always with him. We laugh not because we feel superior, but because we recognize that, yes, we too have the little failing that has just been revealed.



"Unconquerable Russia," by David Burliuk, currently on exhibition at the ACA gallery.

Such qualities, and they are richly communicated in Miss Phillips' sensitive prose, more than make up for a certain looseness in the dramatic structure of the play. I feel that the production tends too much to subordinate Masha to the professor. Perhaps the difficulty is inherent in the original script (though, significantly, it was called *Mashenka*), but I rather suspect that some of the undramatic curtains are due to the fact that our attention is drawn to the grandfather to the exclusion of Masha. The process of discovery, which is the dramatic crux here, should be seen as mutually and simultaneously affecting both generations.

The varied roles are given sympathetic expression. Dudley Digges is a commanding figure as the grandfather and Susan Robinson is an appealing Masha. Martin Blaine's Leonid is forthright, though at

times too nervously energetic. Viola Frayne is a bit sandwiched-in as Masha's mother. The children are splendid, particularly Michael Dreyfuss as the charmingly sententious Senya Marshak. The setting by Howard Bay is superb in its depiction of the cloistered study that is being stormed from the ante-room.

This production is a notable occasion, for it introduces in Peggy Phillips a new writer for the stage who shows considerable resourcefulness and understanding. Appropriately dedicated to the memory of Lem Ward, whose untimely death deprived our stage of its best young director, *Listen, Professor!* deserves a good long run on Broadway. The Nazis killed Alexander Afinogenov, but his work lives on to nourish our faith in the decent human being whom he portrayed so delightfully.

SAMUEL SILLEN.

DAVID BURLIUK

Moses Soyfer discusses a great painter and his work. "The people who own his pictures love them and would not part with them."

BEFORE I write about the pictures of David Burliuk, currently on exhibition at the ACA Galleries, I would like to say a few words about their creator. Burliuk is sixty-two years old. His life has been rich in experience, travel, and achievement. He has known the world's great. He was Mayakovsky's teacher and Maxim Gorky's intimate friend. He came to America more than twenty years ago, already famous as the father of Russian futurism, a seasoned veteran of many artistic and political battles. "Before I came here," he tells Michael Gold, "I had grandiose and exotic dreams of Java and Thailand as my home. But I picked the United States—it seemed to me the most romantic of all the new worlds, and I have not been disappointed. It is a great continent. It has taught me patience."

Yes, Burliuk is a most patient and industrious man. For twenty years he lived in an East Side cold tenement flat, working as an actor, proofreader, journalist, and feature writer. At night he studied and painted. Although a small group of artists, collectors, and art lovers knew him and his work and prized him for his genius, general recognition in this country came late in life. It is only in the last few years that his work has begun to sell. The people who own his pictures love them and would not part with them. I know a young girl whose sole possessions, literally, are the clothes she wears and a small landscape by Burliuk, which she acquired on

the installment plan. "I don't need a room with a southern exposure," she says blithely. "Wherever I hang my sunny Burliuk, there is my home."

Raphael Soyfer owns a little self-portrait by Burliuk, painted some two years ago. In it he painted himself in a thoughtful mood, seated at a table with his hand resting upon an open volume. Other objects scattered about on the table are a globe, a watch, a glass of wine, and a frugal still-life of fruit and bread. In the background are shelves filled with books by his contemporaries—Mayakovsky, Aseyev, Kamensky—and on the wall hang paintings by his friends, which he loves to collect. In the corner on a pedestal one discerns Noguchi's bust of Burliuk's wife, Mary. Painted in a serious, almost solemn vein, as the old masters did at times, one feels that Burliuk represented himself in this painting as he would like to be known to posterity.

ON ENTERING the ACA Gallery, I was impressed by the amazing vitality, bouyancy, and fantasy of the canvases. With the exception of the painting "Unconquerable Russia," the subject matter is of the Burliukian type that is so well known: brightly dressed girls with blue, yellow, and red cows; variations of his famous "tea-drinkers," especially the very forceful "Tolstoy drinking tea at the home of Widow Kopylov." The portraits of Lenin and Stalin on the wall add a quaint anachronistic note to the picture.

There are also peasants at work and play, Gloucester fishermen, East Side streets, etc.

"Unconquerable Russia" is a huge, rich, sombre tapestry of a painting. It depicts the giant figure of Tolstoy in the foreground and Lenin plowing against an apocalyptic sky. This painting was begun in 1925 and completed this year. The figure of Lenin shows traces of futurism (an earlier phase of Burliuk's art) while Tolstoy and the rest of the picture are painted in what Burliuk likes to call the "palette style." The functional distortion of the figures and the general color scheme unite the two styles and create the powerful whole. Truly, the great culture and leadership and rich resources of the land that make Russia unconquerable are passionately symbolized in this painting.

"On the Shores of Dnieper" is a memory picture of the rich Ukraine full of sunshine, life, and song as it must have been before the Nazi scourge laid it waste. One cannot but be moved deeply by this lovely painting.

A BURLIUK exhibition is never complete without a portrait of his wife. This contains two. One of them shows her seated at a window with an open book; in the other she is painted in her garden at Hampton Bays, surrounded by lilacs. Both are tenderly painted tributes to his lifelong companion and collaborator.

One day in my studio in the course of conversation, I said to old, one-eyed Burliuk, "I have seen you in many moods: cheerful, explosive, sarcastic, but never in a melancholy one." He gave one of his characteristic unexpected answers. "My dear friend, why should I be unhappy? My life is behind me." Then, smiling, he added, "Good artists become more optimistic and diligent as they get older. Didn't Cezanne build his largest studio four years before his death and didn't Renoir paint his gayest pictures with the brushes tied to his paralytic hands?"

MOSES SOYER.

Martha Graham's Art

The major new work of a modern dancer.

MARTHA GRAHAM, America's greatest modern dancer, recently gave her first Broadway recital in two seasons before a sold-out house. Two new works were presented: a solo, "Salem Shore," and "Deaths and Entrances," which used, in addition to Miss Graham, a company of nine dancers. "Punch and the Judy," also a group work, concluded the evening.

"Salem Shore," a ballad of longing for the return of a man at sea, at this first