

fuses to admit defeat. This illuminates scene after scene, requiring not so much audience "stomach" as heart and understanding. I would like to select a few sequences to illustrate this point.

Early in the film, as Olena, the captured guerrilla, is in labor, the entire village's concern is for her comfort. When the twelve-year-old son of Maliuchia, one of the villagers, is killed, attempting to bring her some bread, Maliuchia retrieves the body, that it may be buried by Russian hands. The Nazis turn the village upside down in an effort to find the body, but no one betrays the secret. Normally, so tragic a death might lead to defeat and resignation, but not so here. Even the shooting of her son is turned by Maliuchia into an opportunity for defiance and defeat of the enemy. The boy's burial is a moving and poignant incident. With characteristic stoicism, the mother and her other children bury him inside the house. As they trample down the earth, so that the Nazis will not detect the grave, the youngest begins to cry. The sound provides a grim counterpoint to the threnody of the burial. Only the very youngest lacks the final discipline, says the expression of the other children as they silently stamp upon the earth covering their brother. This example of unbreakable spirit appears again in Olena as she is having her child. Frozen, beaten, starved, wracked by pain, attended only by two brutish guards, she hangs on so that she may give birth. Future generations will build a stronger and better world, will cover the scars of the present. She must contribute to that future. You understand that that is why, even in the midst of war, she plans to have a baby, and why she can be stronger than her own suffering. But she will not sell out, even at the price of saving this life. The future cannot be purchased at the expense of the present. Rather than betray the guerrillas, she sees her newborn baby killed.

This spirit is manifest in a mass demonstration in what is perhaps the most memorable scene in the picture. The villagers are sustained in their hardships by the thought that sooner or later the Red Army will rescue them. Sooner or later, their tormentors will feel the wrath of the Russian armed fighters. But the first time the film introduces any Red Army men, they are part of a wounded, barefooted, bleeding column of prisoners. The women (their mothers, wives, and sweethearts) might well have been heartbroken, but their only thought is for the comfort of the wounded men.

When one of the men whispers they have had no food for three days, every hut is ransacked for the last remaining morsel of bread. Up and down the street the women dart around the Nazi soldiers, pressing their bread upon the captives. Music, camera, actors synchronize their movement to create a breathtaking moment. When machinegun fire puts an end to this business, mothers urge their small sons to cut across the fields and intercept the moving column. By throwing the bread upon the road, some of the Russian prisoners might be able to pick it up. Though the death of her oldest son is still fresh in her memory, Maliuchia urges her next oldest to run with the bread. The boys struggle through the snowdrifts and the audience struggles with them. But the youngsters get there too late, and tears of frustration cloud their vision as they watch the column straggle out of sight.

The episodes I have dwelt upon are not isolated in quality or meaning from the rest of the film. I merely indicate them to outline the spirit which dominates its entire length.

This film is persuasive in its historical

content not only because of the writing and acting, which leave little to be desired, but also because of its technical brilliance. Cameraman Boris Monastirsky has photographed backgrounds and objects with a view to composition, dramatic use of light and shade, structure, and clarity, but has so selected his shots as to make them part of the action. The houses of the village, the snow, the windswept streets, the dismantled interiors, are part of the historic moment. These shots are so carefully interwoven into the fabric of the whole that they underline facial expression, give added weight to the dialogue. In short, by the sensitive and understanding use of scenery and props, the background ceases to be a static backdrop against which the actors perform, but becomes in itself a dramatic factor that contributes to the total meaning. It is a filmic achievement that creates as untheatrical and as realistic a product as a "staged" motion picture can be made to be.

Director Mark Donskoy can indeed be proud of his handiwork. Most critics have called it a masterpiece that will live beyond its immediate relevance.

## ON BROADWAY

THIS year as last, the Broadway theater has opened up with a veritable spluttering of new plays not worth their popping and the critics are struggling with a vocabulary which cannot adequately express the inconsequential effect. However, of the six plays that came in this fortnight, one is definitely a lovely rocket and goes far to restore one's faith in the theater's being a place of feeling and beauty. I refer to John Van Druten's *I Remember Mama*, adapted from Kathryn Forbes' slight family sketches in *Mama's Bank Account*.

I am not sure Clarence Day started it, but since *Life With Father*, which in book form was a collection of family sketches, we have had a number of gay stage renditions of other loosely-living family characterizations—for characterization has been their common strength. There was *My Sister Eileen*, and there still is *Chicken Every Sunday*. In the new dramatization brought to the Music Box by the indefatigable team of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, Miss Forbes' Norwegian immigrants come to life with a sense of earnestness of purpose, family loyalty, and tender-

ness of interrelationships that is very touching even though it is depicted in comedy. Mr. Van Druten has again done a sweet job of writing and directing and he has been seconded by a delightful company enjoying an actor's holiday.

But most of all, he has to thank Oscar Homolka for his robust, roistering, tyrannical Uncle Chris, and Mady Christians, whom I consider a great lady of the theater, for her wonderfully wise and direct portrayal of Mama. It is Mama that is the heart and center of the story. It is she who is the strategist, the annealer, the exemplar to her children, the moderator among her snippish sisters. The fictional bank account with which she constantly bolsters the family's sense of security draws its real cash from her fierce love for all of them.

Though the play is arbitrarily divided into two parts, Mama is actually engaged in three major episodes: seeing her youngest child, Dagmar, through her hospitalization to health; bringing the comfort of her wisdom and love to Uncle Chris at his dying; and taking her oldest daughter, Katrin, who so wants to be a writer, out of the stage of aping

what she has read and into the stage of her own life experience. There are a number of subsidiary episodes interspersed throughout: Mama helping her maiden sister to clinch the neighborhood undertaker, club-footed Uncle Chris bullying doctors and nurses so that he can sit beside his little nephew in the hospital and roar encouragement at him to get well and be able to run about again, Katrin learning to value honest sentiment above show, and Mama bestowing upon Katrin her first cup of coffee, symbol of her having grown up. Katrin, beautifully played by Joan Tetzl, is a charming study of a creative, expressive girl, curious about all experience, sometimes frightened by its challenge but meeting it bravely, as when she is called upon to witness her Uncle's death, and at all times trying to find out more about herself in the knowledge that she is the key to all humanity. In contrast, her younger sister, played with sureness by Frances Hefin, has no creative avenue of expression and sees all experience from the intensely sharp angle of family interest.

Though the artistic success of *I Remember Mama* depends upon the most delicate balances of characterization and incident, it is only occasionally that Van Druten's adroit hand misses. One of the off-key spots is the caricatured scene in the park between Aunt Trina and her little husband—definitely the fault of the writer-director, for until then Adrienne Gessner and Bruno Wick had been entirely in realistic character. In spite of its amusing nature, I thought the play actually stopped with the gay death scene, which was perhaps just a bit too gay; therefore the last episode in which Katrin grows up seemed to drag a bit, like a tail that shouldn't have been there.

Van Druten's manner of cohering the rambling original is fresh and arresting in its marriage of radio convention to theater presentation: Katrin's narration forms the bridges that hold the incidents together, yet she moves directly into their action. George Jenkins, employing turntables at both ends of the fixed center, moved the production brilliantly along from scene to scene. Lucinda Ballard dressed the company with clever regard for all character values. Altogether, an evening everybody loved.

**I**N *Snafu*, the only other entertaining play of the period under consideration, Louis Solomon and Harold Buchman employ the first act to set up the double problem of adjustment to civilian life of a Marine Sergeant of sixteen, dis-

charged after battle experience, and the adjustment of his parents to a boy whom they have to get to know again. They then devote the next two acts to avoiding altogether the stated theme.

For the truth is that what happens to Ronald Stevens when he gets out of uniform might have happened to him if he had never heard of the war. Instead of following through on the many indicated angles of adjustment, the authors hurl Ronny out of comedy into the most contrived farcical situations involving mistaken identities, climbing into a girls' dormitory at night, an implied accusation of theft, and bastardy. The resulting evening is wholly out of George Abbott; but once you've made the necessary adjustment, it constitutes a good time for all: playwrights, director, actors, and audience. Billy Redfield gives us a perfectly believable boy more harassed by his authors than by the psychological situation; Russell Hardie and Elspeth Eric struggle hard to keep their parts from being held to a comic-strip pattern. There are many other competent and amusing performances, especially by the rather over-strenuous Eugenia Delarova, by Bethel Leslie as the girl next door, by Enid Markey as her evil-minded chaperon, by Patricia Kirkland, and by John Souther—who once more proves himself a delightful character actor. The best single feature in the play, and the best of its kind in many seasons of living-room dramas, is the beautiful and spacious set by John Root.

The theme of the returning serviceman has now been treated one way or another in a number of this season's presentations, most notably in *Men to the Sea*. It deserves real exploration because it is becoming, and must increasingly become, a serious problem to many millions of our people.

HARRY TAYLOR.

## At the Ballet

**N**EW works by George Balanchine were the featured premieres of the short fall season by the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo at the City Center Theater, and by the Ballet Theater at the Metropolitan Opera House. "*Dances Concertantes*" (Stravinsky) and "*Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*" (Strauss)—the latter unfinished at the time of presentation—were given by the Ballet Russe; "Ballet Academy" (Rieti) by the Ballet Theater.

Balanchine represents a trend in ballet which cries for appraisal on its own

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