

GERTRUDE LAWRENCE

In A New Musical Play,

The King and I

Music by

RICHARD RODGERS

Book and Lyrics by

OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN 2nd

Based on the Novel "Anna and the King of Siam" by

MARGARET LONDONwith **YUL BRYNNER****DOROTHY SARNOFF · DORETTA MORROW**Directed by **JOHN van DRUTEN**Settings and Lighting by **JO MIELZNER**Costumes designed by **IRENE SHARAFF**Choreography by **JEROME ROBBINS****ST. JAMES THEA., 44 St. W. of B'way**

Eves. at 8:25. Mats. Wed. & Sat. at 2:25

Presented in association with
LELAND HAYWARD & JOSHUA LOGAN**PULITZER PRIZE and CRITICS' AWARD****MARTHA WRIGHT****GEORGE BRITTON**

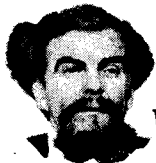
IN

South PacificMusic by **RICHARD RODGERS**Lyrics by **OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN 2nd**

Book by

OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN 2nd & JOSHUA LOGANAdapted from **JAMES A. MICHENER'S Pulitzer Prize Winning "TALES OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC"**Directed by **JOSHUA LOGAN**Scenery & Lighting by **Jo Mielziner**with **MYRON MCCORMICK****MAJESTIC, 44th Street W. of B'way**

Evenings 8:30. Matinees Wed. & Sat. 2:30

MONDAY EVES. ONLY: CURTAIN AT 7 SHARPENGAGEMENT ENDS MARCH 15th
"MAGNIFICENT!" **ATKINSON, Times****S. HUOK presents****EMLYN WILLIAMS**

AS

Charles DickensEve. incl. Sun. 8:30, Mats. Wed., Sat. 2:30
GOLDEN THEATER, 45 St. West of B'way

Leland Hayward presents

**Ethel Merman**
in
"Call Me Madam"with **RICHARD EASTHAM**Music & Lyrics by **IRVING BERLIN**Book by **HOWARD LINDSAY & RUSSEL CROUSE**Directed by **GEORGE ABBOTT**Dances & Musical Numbers by **JEROME ROBBINS****IMPERIAL, 241 W. 45th St.**

Evs. at 8:30. Mats. WED. & SAT. at 2:30

only writing but overwriting shamelessly, deliriously, ecstatically. He knows this as well as we do, and spoofs his fondness for words in that sentence, a tongue-twister if there ever was one, which Miss Palmer reads triumphantly in spite of its being forty-four lines long.

The evening's real disappointment runs deeper. In "Venus Observed" the same Mr. Fry who charms our ears also tires them. He gives us more than we can take and yet less than we want. His words, beguiling as they are, lack substance. We feel pleased and cheated at the same time. Far worse than suffering verbally from too much of a muchness, "Venus Observed" ends up by suffering humanly from too much of a littleness. Its brightness cannot hide its emptiness, and that emptiness finally becomes enervating.

—JOHN MASON BROWN.

Fry in the Belfry

A SLEEP OF PRISONERS. By Christopher Fry. Oxford University Press. \$2. In this play, which has been performed in churches abroad and here, the facile Mr. Fry exhibits the endless slippery metaphor ("cling hold of the light") and the eternal pun ("aggression is the better part of Allah") which have you ready to write him off. But just at the saturation point he will come along with a nice piece of simple dramatic poetry ("morning comes to prison like a nurse"), and you give him another chance.

The poet is apparently not too disturbed about his seeming prolixity. In a *New York Times* article that Lewis Funke had the wisdom to order before the New York opening last October, and which the publishers should have but didn't include in this volume, the playwright, who sometimes seems to write better about the theatre than for it, confesses that plots elude him and that what he wants the play to say is that "all souls are in one sorrow" and that the trend is "from division into unity."

These themes, certainly familiar to those who have seen "Venus Observed," are demonstrated in the modern re-enactment of Biblical parables, but are never explored tenaciously enough. Those who hope to find deeper meanings in Mr. Fry's works by reading them are, in this case at least, apt to come away with the feeling that his lines belong on the stage after all. For there, if delivered quickly, they will have the sudden flash, the mysterious evanescence, and the eternal unverifiability of a skyful of flying saucers.

—HENRY HEWES.

SR Recommends

Caesar and Cleopatra and **Antony and Cleopatra**: Shaw's wise comedy and Shakespeare's soaring tragedy excitingly revived by Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh. A glittering addition to the season. (SR Jan. 12.)

I Am a Camera: An interesting and sensitive play by John van Druten, based on Christopher Isherwood's "Berlin Stories." Excellently acted by William Prince and Marian Winters, and memorable for Julie Harris's acting that has rightly established her as a star. (SR Dec. 22.)

Venus Observed: Reviewed in this issue. **Charles Dickens**: Emlyn Williams giving a fine solo performance as Charles Dickens "reading" scenes from his own works. Not to be missed. (SR Feb. 23.)

Point of No Return: An agreeable and sympathetic dramatization by Paul Osborn of John Marquand's novel. Admirable performances by Henry Fonda, Leora Dana, John Cromwell, Robert Ross, and Frank Conroy. (SR Jan. 5.)

The Constant Wife: A revival of Somerset Maugham's witty and engaging comedy, charmingly played by Katharine Cornell, Grace George, and Brian Aherne. (SR Dec. 29.)

Jane: A comedy which has been widely and enthusiastically praised for the urbanity and polish of S. N. Behrman's writing and the excellence of the performances by Edna Best, Basil Rathbone, and Howard St. John. (SR Feb. 16.)

Remains to Be Seen: A farcical whodunit by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse which is jubilantly acted and offers as many laughs as it does thrills. (SR Oct. 20.)

Stalag 17: An exciting and hilarious comedy-melodrama about some American airmen in a German prison camp. Skilfully acted. (SR May 26.)

The Shrike: An absorbing and truly frightening melodrama about a man trapped in a psychiatric ward of a city hospital brilliantly acted and directed by José Ferrer. (SR Feb. 9.)

The King and I: Another Richard Rodgers-Oscar Hammerstein triumph and one of the outstanding and most tasteful musical comedies of our time. Everything about it is right, especially Gertrude Lawrence and Yul Brynner as Anna and the king. (SR Apr. 14.)

Guys and Dolls: Another musical of a very different kind but of the same distinction. In this case a Damon Runyon story has been brought to the stage in a stylized and delectable form which could not be bettered. (SR Dec. 23, 1950.)

Pal Joey: A delightful revival, with Harold Lang and Vivienne Segal, of a modern musical blessed with a diamond-hard, diamond-bright book by John O'Hara and some of the best of Rodgers and Hart's songs. (SR Feb. 2.)

Call Me Madam: In the amusing Irving Berlin-Lindsay and Crouse musical, the great, the one and only, Ethel Merman in topnotch form as an American Ambassador who more than faintly recalls our representative in Luxembourg. (SR Oct. 28, 1950.)

South Pacific: With Martha Wright and George Britton heading the cast, this Rodgers and Hammerstein triumph, staged with such color and vigor by Joshua Logan, remains one of the most beloved current hits. (SR Apr. 30, 1949.)

Top Banana: A musical comedy about a TV star and ex-burlesque headliner which is all Phil Silvers, and what an all Phil Silvers he is!

—J. M. B.

SR Goes to the Movies

WESTERNS, HOI

IT IS one of the fundamental laws of the movie business that no Western picture ever loses money for its producing company. Audiences are virtually assured. The dozens of "little Westerns" turned out each year, films that rarely get near the larger cities, reap their modest harvest in the thousands of family theatres scattered through rural and ranching districts. But the "big Western," the picture studded with stars and tinted with Technicolor, is a gilt-edged investment. It can play both the big towns and the provinces—and clean up in both. Whenever a director, a star, or a producer wants to play it cozy, he does a Western. And oddly enough, despite the fact that everyone knows a Western can't fail, a successful Western has repeatedly restored the sagging stock of many a Hollywood personality.

Fritz Lang is a good example. A leading director in Germany during the silent era, Lang came to this country in the mid-Thirties. His first film was "Fury," a brilliant but controversial story of mob violence. Two highly interesting pictures followed, also on social themes, "You Only Live Once" and "You and Me." Neither did particularly well at the box office. After almost two years of inactivity, Darryl Zanuck permitted him to do "The Return of Frank James," and with its success Lang returned to the ranks of the top directors. In recent years he has begun to slide again. "Rancho Notorious" (RKO), starring Marlene Dietrich, Arthur Kennedy, and Mel Ferrer, may very well bring him back.

"Rancho Notorious" is only one of a dozen big Westerns now entering release at approximately the same time (a sure sign that the studios have been trimming their sails in recent months, at least until they find which way the wind is blowing). "Bend of the River," "Battle at Apache Pass," "Treasure of Lost Canyon" (all from Universal), "Bugles in the Afternoon" and "The Big Trees" (Warner), "Lone Star" (MGM), "California Conquest" (Columbia)—and there are more—all of them base their prime bid for popularity on their stars, a constellation that includes Clark Gable, Ava Gardner, Broderick Crawford, James Stewart, Arthur Kennedy, Kirk Douglas, Marlene Dietrich, Ray Milland, William Powell, and, of course, Randolph Scott. The fault, dear Brutus, is not in their stars . . .

Other considerations apart for the moment, the Western is fundamentally a very satisfying movie form. The camera goes outdoors to photograph handsome, colorful scenery. The story, with its fights and chases, its eternal conflict between good and evil, is filled with physical action and movement. The emphasis is always on what the camera sees, not what the sound track says.

But it is a form in which the law of diminishing returns sets in quickly. One can see just so many variations of landscape behind the same basic plot, and then the plot itself begins to pall. The Indians can tangle with the U.S. Cavalry just so many times before one starts noticing samenesses instead of differences. Techniques that once were fairly breath-taking rapidly become clichés, like the shot of the peaceful stagecoach in the valley and the swift pan over to the watching Indians, like the arrow that whistles out of nowhere to impale an innocent. True, there is today less of the old fadeout of boy, girl, and horse against the sunset. But in its place have risen new patterns, new formulas.

As compared to the early Western format, in which the heroine was a blue-eyed nonentity kept in cold storage until the finale, today's Western woman takes a far more active part in the proceedings. Ava Gardner in "Lone Star" is entrusted with a powerful newspaper. Patrice Wymore in "The Big Trees" leads the opposition against the predatory lumbermen. And Marlene Dietrich in "Rancho Notorious" actually heads the film's band of desperadoes. The heroes too are a bit more complicated than they used to be. In "Lone Star" Clark Gable favors annexation for Texas because that will mean war with Mexico and he can sell more beef to the Army. In "Bend of the River" James Stewart has a cattle-rustling past to live down. In "Bugles in the Afternoon" Ray Milland had been cashiered out of the Army for conduct unbecoming an officer before going West to join the Cavalry. In "The Big Trees" Kirk Douglas is an unscrupulous, unprincipled lumber boss. But all are thoroughly reformed characters by the final fadeout, and with their reformation they become as simple and predictable as Tom Mix, Hoot Gibson, or Gene Autry.

Recognizing the basic similarity that underlies these pictures, some of their

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