



The Girl Who Likes to Try Everything

AFTER the New Haven opening of "The Girl in Pink Tights" there were the usual conflicting opinions about the potentialities of this musical comedy and what ought to be changed and polished in the five weeks before the New York premiere. However, the large group of New Yorkers present appeared to agree on one thing. Renée Jeanmaire is the most exciting musical-comedy personality to come along in the postwar period.

Mlle. Jeanmaire's success will surprise no one who has followed her ballet career. From the beginning it has been clear that here was a girl with a passion for work, a superb theatrical instinct, a highly intelligent sense of humor, and above all an unquenchable desire to try everything.

Like most ballet dancers, Zizi (a nickname acquired when as an infant she tried to pronounce "Jésus" and wound up with "Zeezee") began young. At ten she was a member of the apprentices at the Paris Opéra. By eighteen she had developed to the point where she was giving occasional gala performances with a partner. But already she was getting restless with a constant diet of classical ballets. "L'Opéra is nice for a couple of months a year," she says, "but I did not care for it as a steady job."

She left to join the Monte Carlo Ballet, in which she starred for two years. Then came a switch to the Ballet Russe for a brief period, after which she met a young choreographer named Roland Petit and cast her fortunes with his new little troupe. While the Petit company was both progressive and good (the first year Zizi was there Margot Fonteyn danced with them), Zizi kept after M. Petit to produce a big ballet for her. Finally he thought up the idea of doing a dance version of "Carmen." "When he said it I was frightened," recalls Zizi, "'Carmen' is so dramatic; I didn't think I could do it, but I wanted to try."

Try she did, and when "Carmen" opened at the Princess Theatre in London it received thirty-two curtain calls and Zizi had enlarged her career beyond the ballet. It was in "Carmen," too, that she first came to Broadway in the spring of 1949. She was a sensation and the late Lee Shubert wanted to star her in a new edition of "Streets of Paris." But Zizi felt honor-bound to stay with Petit

even though she had no contract with him.

The following season the dramatic dancer went a step further. She appeared in a new ballet, "La Croqueuse de Diamants," in which she not only capitalized on her dramatic ability, but also sang a song. After performing this half-ballet, half-musical-comedy in Paris and New York the troupe went to the West Coast, where M. Petit was engaged by Samuel Goldwyn to do the choreography and to dance himself in "Hans Christian Andersen." He had already signed Moira Shearer for the featured dancing role, but before it came time to shoot the film Miss Shearer became pregnant and was forced to withdraw. Zizi was hired to replace her. She immediately rented a house with a swimming pool. "I wanted to try everything," she explains.

Zizi had little time for swimming, however. For three months she studied English with a lady named Roberts and a recording machine. Since she had to speak lines as well as sing and dance, she was very worried about the film. "In the first scenes, because I am afraid, I laugh too much. I am better later on in the picture after I have seen the rushes."

After the film the dancer returned to Paris with the troupe, despite Mr. Goldwyn's attempts to sign her to a longer contract. After rehearsing a while Zizi and M. Petit decided—as artistic collaborators so often do—that the time had come in their careers for each to go their separate ways.

For Zizi, who had been concentrating on modern theatrical ballets, this meant going back and relearning a classical repertoire. It meant arranging her life around the all-important twice-daily trips between her small unpretentious apartment off the Rue Pigalle and a shabby dance studio on the Boulevard de Clichy two blocks away. And as the song in "La Croqueuse de Diamants" put it, "There's nothing chi-chi about the Boulevard de Clichy."

Fortunately, Joseph Fields, whom she had met in Hollywood, heard that Zizi was free and cabled her to come to New York and discuss appearing in "The Girl in Pink Tights," for which he was writing the book. She agreed, and last July Shepard Traube, the musical comedy's producer and director, went to Paris with the script—

which has to do with how American melodrama and French ballet might have gotten together to produce American musical comedy. Mr. Traube became enchanted with the unpretentious way that this celebrated ballerina went about her work. "This is real democracy," he said as he watched her taking her turn in a room with a dozen or so others, most of whom were greatly inferior to her. Being an astute showman, Mr. Traube has brought in a great deal of this inside atmosphere of ballet, so that by the present time the show is one part Kentucky Bourbon and three parts French Vermouth.

Watching the gamine-like Jeanmaire practise is indeed an enlightening experience. The long-thighed dancer goes directly into action with complete economy. Her concentration is so great that she can flick a drop of perspiration off the side of her nose without disturbing the maneuver she is executing. When she is doing a difficult stretch she will bite her tongue, and when she is making quick turns on one foot (fouettés) she grits her teeth in determination to make the turns both rapid and precise. When it comes to performing in front of a mirror, many dancers smile in admiration of their own loveliness and grace. But Zizi, who is lovelier and more graceful than almost any ballerina in the world, wears an expression of deep concern as she analyzes and criticizes some minor inability of a muscle to perform exactly as she wants it. She will suffer agonies during the lesson, and then afterwards comment about the instructor, "He didn't stretch me enough today." Her instructor, when asked her weakness, thinks a moment, "Well, she cannot dance on her hands."

Zizi, who is more critical of herself than anybody else is of her, has a



—Valente.

Jeanmaire—"real democracy."

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different answer. "Technically per-
 haps I can do classical ballet, but I
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 I'm not quiet. I can't control my ex-
 citement and I jump too much. I
 could do the first act of Giselle all
 right, but I would be terrible in the
 second part, because it becomes
 something not my character."

The dancer is having no trouble
 with "The Girl in Pink Tights." In
 fact, the producers have gone too far
 in the other direction and in the New
 Haven version have even called the
 stage character "Zizi." While this is
 one of the things Mlle. Jeanmaire
 hopes to have changed before New
 York, as she feels that it is too per-
 sonal and a little pretentious, she is
 less concerned over what people think
 or say about her than she is in her
 evaluation of her own work. As she
 said when asked if she was disturbed
 about columnists linking her roman-
 tically with Howard Hughes, "As long
 as my thinking is all right, my be-
 having is all right."

Since arriving in New York last
 November Zizi has been kept in a
 state of happy exhaustion working
 with Frank Tauritz on her English,
 with Sylvan Levin on her singing, and
 with Agnes de Mille on the dances.
 These collaborations appear to have
 been fruitful, particularly the latter.
 Miss de Mille has the reputation of
 working her dancers till they drop,
 and Zizi is never satisfied that she has
 been drilled hard enough, so it must
 have been an exciting contest. Who
 won? Perhaps the tip-off can be found
 in a remark overheard on the way
 out of the theatre in New Haven. Said
 one astonished show-business veter-
 an, "It's the first time I've ever seen
 Agnes do anything with a sense of
 humor to it."

"LULLABY" features expert comic
 direction by Jerome Mayer, crack
 acting by Mary Boland, Kay Med-
 ford, and Jack Warden, and honest
 writing by Don Appell. However, the
 naturalistic story of the tragic lengths
 a mother will go to in order to pre-
 serve her dominance and preferred
 status with a thirty-eight-year-old
 son who has finally married is a diffi-
 cult one to pursue on the level of
 farce. For the core of this play is
 certainly grim. Has the son married
 his bride as a replacement for his
 aging mother?

Though provocative, the theme is
 never resolved. Instead, the play
 keeps jumping into undisguised farce
 antics. Such hilarious bits as the mo-
 ment when the shy bridegroom is
 surprised by his wife as he is putting
 on his trousers and trips in embar-
 rassment make "Lullaby" an occa-
 sionally very funny entertainment.

—HENRY HEWES.

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Trailer Trouble

"THE LONG, LONG TRAILER" is a very funny movie about a young couple who start married life by moving into a trailer and then moving cross-country with it. Having no preconceived notions about such an existence, I was unprepared for M-G-M's revelations of the vicissitudes that can be encountered simply by dragging a trailer along behind one's automobile. So horrifying are some of the happenstances in the movie that I was at once struck by the thought that the entire trailer industry would rise to arms, cry havoc, and yell "Foul!" It would be hard for a chap to be more wrong. In a recent issue of *Variety*, M-G-M has placed a trade advertisement calling attention to the promotion campaign on behalf of the picture. "The New Moon Trailer Company," the ad announces, "will run full-page ads in four colors in terrific-circulation Sunday supplements and eleven top national magazines, plus local advertising at time of playdates. All ads plug the picture."

I find it hard to understand the New Moon Trailer Company's reasoning, unless they figure that anything Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz go for the rest of the country will go for. The Arnaz's, refugees from TV for the time being, enact the couple who buy the trailer. Nevertheless, it still seems to me that "The Long, Long Trailer" is a weird commercial for the New Moon people. Right at the start we learn that the monstrous chrome and chrome yellow job costs in the neighborhood of six thousand dollars, plus time-payment interest charges. To haul the thing a new, high-powered car is needed. (The Arnaz's choose a yellow Mercury convertible at a cost of roughly three thousand. The Mercury car dealers, it is announced, will lend a hand in promoting the picture.) Attaching trailer to car is an operation costing several hundred more, so the movie intimates. But financial worries are not the only ones for the trailerite. Desi learns that it's of paramount importance to first stop the trailer, *then* the car. Otherwise, there'll be a ban-shee wail, and car and trailer jack-knife. Lucille finds, to her sorrow, that you just don't cook in the Youngstown kitchen (the Youngstown people, too, will help promote) while on the move. She learns the hard way, by winding up on the bucketing floor

as part of the salad she's preparing.

And the horrors don't stop there. Never, never park a trailer on any sort of incline: eggs will drip right off the griddle, and the coffee pot has to be wired in place, and wine can be enjoyed only after Scotch-taping the glasses to the table. (Nothing said in *Variety* about any Scotch-tape promotion.) A lot more happens to them that I haven't the space to go into right now, but be assured that Albert Hackett and Frances Goodrich, the screenwriters, have researched the field thoroughly. They've put it all in terms of sight gags, some of them reminiscent of the best type of silent movie comedy (and maybe now and then reminiscent of "I Love Lucy"), and Vincent Minelli has, by expert direction, taken it quite out of the realm of corn. There's a helpful touch of satire now and then that keeps the movie from being simply a set of variations on a limited gag theme. I particularly liked a wedding-party scene in which the guests must whip up artificial enthusiasm each time the couple seems about able to get car and trailer started on the honeymoon journey.

Actually, since I've never had the slightest intention of living in a trailer, I thoroughly enjoyed the movie, having quite forgotten that Lucille Ball not only has red hair, but that she has comic abilities beyond those "I Love Lucy" has ever suggested. It's nice, too, seeing her full size again. Desi Arnaz has an accent that has always been too cute for my taste, but my sympathies were certainly enlisted in his behalf during his battles with the trailer. One quite uproarious scene has him trying to back the trailer into a driveway, a job he manages only after uprooting an in-law's garden, smashing hedges, and finally crashing through a rose trellis. It's handled in a way similar to the running gag kind of thing Harold Lloyd used to do. Well, just make sure that all that Sunday supplement promotion leads you into the movie theatre first and the annual trailer show second.

* * *

"Rob Roy," a Walt Disney live-action film produced in England, has not been based on the Sir Walter Scott novel and is only vaguely based on historical fact, but out of some legendary adventure of a highland rogue of the Clan MacGregor during the