

# Seeing Things

## THE U.N. MOVES TO BROADWAY

**W**ALTER KERR, the *Herald Tribune's* excellent critic, started his review of "The Prescott Proposals"\* by saying, "Graustark is now officially a member of the United Nations." A good thing, too. Since Graustark has always stood for imagination at its freest, the admission of this little kingdom to the U.N. must be welcomed as strengthening the ranks of those of us who believe in freedom—in the theatre no less than outside of it.

The standard operating procedure of the U.N. may not be geared to cover smoldering romances from the past, new love affairs burning strong and bright at high levels, the removal of the corpse of a delegate inconsiderate enough to die of a heart attack in the house of the glamorous widow representing the United States, suspicions of poison, a demand from the City of New York for an autopsy, and the crack-up of a Soviet delegate in the midst of a harangue before the General Assembly. But there is no reason, earthly or Martian, why Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, when the United Nations is their theme, should not mix international politics with intrigue, romance, and grue. Remember five years back Madame Kasenkina's leap for freedom from a window of the Russian consulate in New York. Recall a scant three months ago Marek Korowicz's pre-dawn escape down the fire stairs of the Chatham Hotel from the Communist Polish delegation. Indeed, acknowledge, in ways beyond counting and frightening to think of, the present's insistent closeness to melodrama, and the high tension and romantic goings-on in "The Prescott Proposals" are easy to accept. Certainly they are as theatre, considering the evening's rich dividends in pleasures.

Politics, actual politics, are not my concern for the moment. This much, however, I must say. The Truman and Eisenhower Administrations can both be charged with failing the country in one respect. Neither thought of

sending Katharine Cornell to the U.N. as one of our representatives. This was a grave error, but inasmuch as the Messrs. Lindsay and Crouse have sent her there in "The Prescott Proposals" perhaps no Government investigations are in order.

The United States and world peace have never had a more persuasive spokesman than Miss Cornell, nor has she been blessed since "The Barrets of Wimpole Street" with so good a part in a new play. That she is beautiful may give her an advantage, but it does not diminish her usefulness as a delegate. Always alluring, Miss Cornell is at her most conquering as Mrs. Prescott. She moves with glorious grace, is stunningly dressed by Main Bocher, and makes any audience captive by that compelling quality (call it personality, magnetism, radiance, authority, or what you will) which only a handful of the world's players possess.

In most plays actors are asked to impersonate characters who, regardless of their professions, are at leisure. In "The Prescott Proposals" Miss Cornell is seen not only as a woman away from the U.N. but as a delegate hard

at work, and she is equally fascinating as both. When she puts on horn-rimmed spectacles to sign her mail, go over a speech, study the agenda in a committee meeting, listen to a fellow delegate, or raise her hand to make a point herself, one is convinced that this is no make-believe which is occupying her. She is a woman of the world, a figure accustomed to public life whose wisdom matches her glamour. Even the Soviets would have no excuse for not liquidating their delegate if he failed to succumb to her.

There are those esthetes from the byways who scoff at Broadway professionalism, using the term as if it stood for something as tawdry as Broadway itself. That it can be cheap, slick, and empty—all wrapping and no package—is true beyond question. But at its best Broadway professionalism is a glorious thing. It does not stint. It has something to offer which amateurs, however gifted, dedicated, or contributive, cannot give. It stands for showmanship, informed and smooth running. It is the product of long, hard years of experience. It is the work of people who, whether they are artists or not, are artisans and have mastered their craft. It is a guarantee of the touch that is expert, a demonstration of skills lovingly fused.

Leland Hayward's production represents Broadway professionalism at its best. Mr. Lindsay's direction is excellent, as alert to the small details of U.N. procedure as it is to stressing the romantic and melodramatic tensions of the plot. The cast-



—Vandamm.

\* THE PRESCOTT PROPOSALS, by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse. Directed by Mr. Lindsay. Setting by Donald Oenslager. Costumes by Main Bocher. Presented by Leland Hayward. With a cast including Katharine Cornell, Felix Aylmer, Lorne Greene, Ben Astar, Roger Dann, Bartlett Robinson, Minoo Daver, etc. At the Broadhurst Theatre, New York City. Opened December 16, 1953.

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ing is no less admirable. It seems doubtful if Sir Gladwyn Jebb could have played the Ambassador from the United Kingdom with more suavity and imperturbability than Felix Aylmer. As the scowling and easily offended Soviet delegate, Ben Astar has the eruptive and rasping insolence which the Kremlin apparently thinks is the first requisite of a diplomat. Although he has some of the Malenkov look, Mr. Astar is brilliantly equipped to take over for the Russians at the U.N. if ever Vishinsky gets hoarse. Minoo Daver's Pakistan representative has a serene strength which is both enviable and admirable. Although Lorne Greene is acceptable enough as the all-knowing radio commentator who suggests Edward R. Murrow, Mr. Murrow would be more plausible and even more pleasing.

Politically the new Lindsay-Crouse melodrama makes no pretense of being heavyweight. Mrs. Prescott's proposals are far from world-shaking. Her suggestion is that, instead of wrangling over controversial issues, the United Nations concentrate on the areas of agreement. Her hope for the future may seem a very simple one based as it is on her discovery at the evening's end that the Soviet delegate is a human being in spite of being a Communist. Yet the tragic fact remains that all of our dreams for peace and the future are based upon this same simple hope—the hope that the humanity of the Russian people will in time make them discard the inhumanities of Communism. Wisely Mr. Lindsay and Mr. Crouse have not tried to undercut the U.N. by coming up with a final solution to the world's problems. Instead, what they have done is to turn to the U.N. for a background which is as novel as their romantic melodrama is ingenious in its plotting.

As a rule settings which win applause are those which call too much attention to themselves. This is not true of the settings Donald Oenslager has designed for "The Prescott Proposals." They do win applause and deserve it because, more than working for the play, they are an integral part of it. Mrs. Prescott's drawing room is the perfect reflection of her taste, her interests, her background, and the sophisticated world to which she belongs. Mr. Oenslager's curtain showing the acres of glass of the U.N. office building and his Committee Room at the U.N. are no less vital to the play. They underwrite the melodrama, granting its romantic fiction a persuasive sense of reality, and hence round off the pleasures of an enjoyable evening.

—JOHN MASON BROWN.

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## SR GOES TO THE MOVIES

### Stanley Kramer's Wild Ones

IT'S BEEN some time since Hollywood has shown a willingness to delve into social disorders for its material, and as a result Stanley Kramer's *"The Wild One"* (Columbia) has a startling freshness about it. *"The Wild One"* has been based on a Frank Rooney short story, *"The Cyclists' Raid,"* which told of a group of young motorcyclists descending like a plague of locusts on a California town. It was a disturbing story, but not a very satisfying one, since it didn't try to show what made the young devils tick; instead it left in the reader's mind a parallel between this manifestation and the work of Hitler's youth during his rise to power. The movie doesn't bother with that facile sort of thing, but makes an honest attempt to discover the seeds of discontent and maladjustment lying behind the surge of social misbehavior. The nice thing about Mr. Kramer's movie is that it doesn't preach or ever state directly what the sources of the trouble are. It's done largely through implication and is helped no end by an astonishing performance on the part of Marlon Brando.

Brando is the leader of the motorcycle "club" that has a habit of taking off for weekends on their motorcycles and finding some place where they can "have a ball." The club is virtually an outlaw gang, and from the very outset they're looking for trouble. They find it in a small town, inadequately policed, and unfamiliar with the tactics of such a gang. It isn't long before a good deal of hell is being raised, and when the citizenry attempts to deal with some wanton destructiveness in a vigilante manner events become even more serious. The motorcyclists aren't shown as evil, but as pent-up and frustrated. They don't know what they're looking for themselves unless it's a chance to thumb their noses at authority. The meanings come through as a result of some fine, moody direction by Laslo Benedek. Brando is wonderfully expressive. Lying behind his bravado you see the crazy, hurt, messed-up child. In fact, at one point when some of the town's citizens are "teaching him a lesson" by beating him up he manages to get out a line that clarifies a good deal, all on its own. "My father could hit twice as hard," he says.

This kind of material Stanley Kramer handles best. All of the good

qualities of his successful films are in this one, and there is little in the way of sentiment or watering-down that have been in his lesser efforts. A cast that includes a young actress, Mary Murphy, and an older hand, Robert Keith, is uniformly capable. A number of the boys in the gang show their familiarity with the jive idiom, and as used by them it seems to contain both menace and a strange sort of pathos. They ride and gun their motorcycles as though they're appendages of their bodies, and use them also to form mobile patterns that seem almost ritualistic. It's not pleasant stuff; the mess the boys get themselves into isn't resolved patly, but it's a rewarding movie to see nevertheless. One has only to read one's newspaper to see that weird happenings of the kind portrayed in the movie are constantly around us. Mr. Kramer's movie (and, of course, John Paxton's fine script) adds to our awareness. It's first-rate moviemaking, and I'd say also something in the way of a public service. It's pleasant to be able to report such conscientiousness in a Hollywood seemingly so consecrated at present to tricks and novelties.

\* \* \*

*"Under the Twelve Mile Reef"* takes us on a visit to the sponge fishermen of the Florida keys. The scenery is nice, the underwater shots intermittently interesting, the story utterly routine. Gilbert Roland, playing a Greek sponge diver, manages to give some credibility to his role, but halfway through he dies, and just about that time the picture dies, too. Robert Wagner has some battles with Terry Moore, and an octopus, all of them coming right about on schedule. Actually, I suppose they're behind schedule, since the movie, which would ordinarily take about eighty minutes to unfold, uses up a good two hours. But this is a CinemaScope movie, and things move slowly in that process. —HOLLIS ALPERT.

