



Immortality and the Living

THE NEWEST attraction at the Theatre De Lys is "Bullfight," a voluptuous theatrical fiesta conceived as art. Written by twenty-nine-year-old Leslie Stevens (son of the vice admiral and diplomat who wrote "Russian Assignment"), this play portrays the vivid story of the brothers Salamanca. Born the sons of a proud line of Spanish bullfighters, Domingo and Esteban are each maintaining the family reputation by carrying on in the Mexican bullring. Domingo is a proud, handsome man who believes that the bullfighter's ritual and the fancy *serpentina* and the moment of truth at the kill are not for himself but for the crowd. After an accident in which he is gored by a bull he migrates to the U.S., where he becomes a degenerate and acquires the nickname of "Sunday Boy" because of his activities as a pimp.

The younger brother, Esteban, on the other hand, is less showy and more genuine. He believes in the direct and earthy rewards of marriage to an Indian girl, friendship with the peons who delight in sharing his glory, and performing the finer but less complex *veronica*. However, Esteban worships Domingo.

The play begins when the disabled Domingo returns to Mexico and takes over the Salamanca household. Being handsome, both his brother's wife and her younger sister lust for him. From this point until the climax in the bull-ring basic passions clash and their inevitable thwartings finally achieve the destruction of all four participants.

In one respect this is excellent. "Bullfight" resembles life in that it consists of a series of brightly dancing details that we cannot or do not want to understand. As such it provides wonderfully plastic material for actor, director, and designer. Hurd Hatfield, who has devoted his career to studying acting methods, finds in Domingo a role where he can use them all. While he is a trifle unsure in some of the stronger scenes, he is genuinely moving in his moments of anguish and defeat. Mario Alcalde is warmly convincing as Esteban. Loretta Leversee is feverishly provocative as the virginal but hot-blooded younger sister. Milton Selzer makes a touching humble peon; Robert Jacquin is impressively vulgar as a spitting rowdy; and Tamara Daykarhanova does a solo gypsy bit that diverts (though I won-

der if diversion is best for the play at that moment).

Perhaps the performance that best illustrates the virtues and faults of director Joseph Anthony's approach to his material is Vivian Nathan's portrayal of Esteban's wife. Miss Nathan stretches her talents to the point of achieving something more vital than she would be permitted to do in almost any Broadway production, but she also stretches so far as to reveal an insufficiency of physical equipment with which to reach her ambitious goal. But this is exactly the kind of activity the Theatre De Lys should encourage. For while such efforts would be ruinous on Broadway, it is fascinating to those of us interested in theatrical art *per se*. Short of a permanent resident company, these studio performances are the only way in which actors can grow.

Mr. Anthony is to be congratulated not merely for his courage, however. In his first directing assignment he has brought visual poetry to the script. He has been aided by Kim Swados and Peggy Clark, whose scenery and lighting have made startling use of every inch of the De Lys stage facilities. Sloan Simpson's help in the staging of the bullfight scenery has added a flavor of authenticity to the production.

In fact, "Bullfight" is full of so much that is good that one wonders why the sum is not magnificent. That it is not is certainly due to a lack of editing and the inability of Mr. Stevens

really to investigate the complexity that lies beneath the surface he has so brilliantly presented. It is perfectly permissible to get lost in the middle of a forest, but not if one only skirts the edge of it.

Still, Mr. Stevens seems a remarkably aware young playwright. He can occasionally come up with such a promising line as "On the best day and in the brightest sun the matador is always a shadow." And, having lived an international life, he avoids American clichés. His play in the hands of Mr. Anthony and a devoted cast is an experience for aficionados.

THE PERPETUATION of legends of heroism from one generation to the next is also causing trouble in Broadway's "The Starcross Story." Diana Morgan's drama previously produced in London under the title of "After My Fashion" deals with an explorer's widow who wishes to augment her husband's immortality by agreeing to a motion picture made on the basis of the reputed story of his life. A monkey wrench is thrown in the works when the explorer's mistress shows up with the shabby truth of the man's life.

For most of the play we are held to the rather artificial story merely by curiosity. Why does Lady Starcross fear Anne Meredith? What is in the hidden letter from Lord Starcross? If these detective-story satisfactions were all there was to "The Starcross Story" it would hardly be worth it.

However, the author adds an interesting question to the last act which makes the whole thing valid. Knowing the falsity of the legend, should the film company compound the forgery? The older generation says "yes." The younger generation says "no." The strong and unscrupulous are lined up against the weak and truthful, and the

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gentle conflict provides a universal and provocative theme. The accusation that for the younger generation "integrity covers a multitude of negatives" will bear a bit of pondering. But a large helping of validity can also be attributed to the performance of Eva Le Gallienne. While not terribly effective in moments of polite chit chat, she is magnificent as she faces moments of crisis with her incomparable "quiet heart." Anthony Ross, though slightly more overwrought than his material justifies, adds sincerity to a character that might easily be played as a caricature. Mary Astor has just the air to make you believe the almost incredible behavior of the mistress.

"The Starcross Story" closed after one performance because of a plagiarism suit by Stanley Kauffman, author of a novel titled "The Dead Hero" published by Rinehart in 1949.

"HIS and Hers" is a middle-class "Kind Sir." Fay and Michael Kanin's (not to be confused with Garson Kanin, author of "Born Yesterday") inside story of the vicissitudes of a man and ex-wife playwrighting team may appeal to those who cultivate an air of Broadway knowingness largely by means of name-dropping. Mentions of "Sardi's, the Algonquin, Cherio's, Chan's, Helen Hayes, house seats, Westport, etc." contribute an air that may be authentic and glamorous, but which only reminds someone in the trade of the incestuousness of the whole Broadway picture.

As a matter of fact, after two acts of such nonsense, in which a divorced author and authoress forced by law to collaborate gradually fall in love with each other again, the Kanins suddenly find a theme. They learn that all the fashionable bickering, the accent on success at any price, is less important than love and integrity. While there is nothing very startling about their discovery, it is the most honest thing the Kanins have to say, and for a moment "His and Hers" assumes a virtue.

Director Michael Gordon and such experienced performers as Celeste Holm, Robert Preston, Elizabeth Patterson, Robert St. John, and Donald McKee have labored patiently and give a certain credibility to a script that is as trivial and unfunny as the nauseously cute towel sets that inspired the title. —HENRY HEWES.

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