

BROADWAY POSTSCRIPT

Triple "en Tente"

STRATFORD, ONTARIO.

IN ONE CORNER of Queen's Park enough daylight remains for the teen-age girls of this Canadian factory and railroad town to finish their nightly softball game. At the other end of the grounds a moderate-sized crowd of serious-minded adults stand in placid summer conversation outside a low and rather ordinary-looking tent. Abruptly a small uniformed band arrays itself in front of the entrance and plays one of those tuneless brassy flourishes which have come to be associated with all Shakespeare productions from the local high school to the Old Vic. This, of course, sets off a last-minute push for the door. Once inside, the sunken auditorium with its 1,900 seats circling the platform stage on three sides seems surprisingly large, but the dark-blue billowy hangings of the interior tent and the nut-brown wood of the jungle-gym stage give a feeling of intimacy which permits the audience to lapse into casual talk again.

Suddenly a violent explosion that appears to have been set off directly under your chair shakes the theatre. For the ensuing thirty seconds every spectator finds himself discussing the shock with his neighbor. Tyrone Guthrie has by means of a six-pound cannon shell succeeded in capturing our joint attention.

Then begins "Oedipus Rex." Out of the two tunnels, which are cut underneath the center portion of the audience, emerge dark figures carrying basins of steaming incense. Soon the dug-out auditorium is filled with layers of pungent chemical smoke to remind us most directly that Thebes is suffering from a horrible plague. It also sets not a few of the spectators to coughing and crying, but a man who will fire a cannon under your seat will do anything. Finally the smoke is allowed to subside and we see the chorus wearing masks which though differing slightly from each other all have a plebeian rotundity. They await Oedipus, the yellow-robed king, who enters through the colonnades. His mask is gold, and its strong square shape is echoed in his proud posture.

From this point on the familiar Sophocles tragedy as adapted by Yeats unrolls with a slightly haunted air that would perhaps be better suited to the Senecan version. James

Oedipus is a muffled, suffer-

ing portrait. His best moment is his pang of recognition when he hears that Laius was killed at a place where three roads meet. Interesting, too, is the breathless panting that accompanies his recounting of how he once killed a man at such a point. Later, when he finds out for certain that he has indeed killed his father and married his mother, he is less effective with an ascending three-tone moan that is too studied.

Tiresias, the blind soothsayer, in a milk-white skull-mask and costume, stumbles through the columns and along the steps in terror-ridden fashion to give a fine feeling of a man totally incapacitated except for his prophetic powers. That he is right and Oedipus wrong is a tremendous irony and Canadian actor Donald Davis keeps his performance dry and hard. Jocasta is masked and appareled in a silvery blue, and Eleanor Stuart gives a clear and thoughtful portrayal of a mother who has guessed for some time that her husband may be her son. Robert Goodier's greenish-brown Creon presents the king-to-be as a man of humility and practicality, which makes a good contrast with the proud and chance-taking Oedipus. And Douglas Campbell as the man from Corinth—he indicates his alien origin by a Mitteleuropean accent—gets the only laugh of the evening when in answer to Oedipus's offer of a reward for his news he replies, "In truth, it was for this I came."

The chorus is more exciting in ap-



—Peter Smith & Co.

"... beautiful method of production."

pearance than it is vocally. The actors chant their strophes and antistrophes in the usual glee-club sing-song, and they move in slow motion without regard to symmetry. Without much doubt it is Tanya Moiseiwitsch's masks and costumes that make "Oedipus Rex" the stimulating visual treat it is. While all masks limit expression, it is surprising how much these do allow. With head erect Oedipus appears proud, but with head slightly bowed a wonderful sadness emanates. When he has put out his eyes he wears a new mask which differs from the old one much more than an actor could change by facial expression. While we do miss the powerful reactions that a great actor like Olivier can by superhuman concentration give us, we gain by an elimination of the imperfectly controlled manifestations that less talented actors are bound to insert into the tragedy. Also there is an increase in abstraction. The particular qualities of each character are hidden. Only what the character stands for, or rather what stands for the character, remains. Not only is this a beautiful method of production which merits future application to other scripts, but the Guthrie-Moiseiwitsch "Oedipus Rex" gives modern audiences an idea of how these plays may have appeared 2,400 years ago at Athens.

IN ADDITION to the Greek play, the Stratford Festival is also presenting "Measure for Measure" and "The Taming of the Shrew." The former is one of Shakespeare's most subtle and interesting plays. Written not long after "Hamlet," it likewise explores the area between purity and corruption. Its central figures are: Angelo, a man so addicted to absolute morality that only an absolutely moral woman can corrupt him; Isabella, that absolutely moral woman who has "to a nunnery gone" but who emerges to have her morality tested by Angelo's proposal that she give herself to him in sin in order to save her convicted brother's life; and the Duke, who has found no solution to the problem of ruling the state of Vienna efficiently without violating the charitable precepts of Christian ethics. Also included is a coarse array of sinners of all types, the most prominent of which is a cynical opportunist, Lucio, who, like most cynics, insists on testing the Duke's "infinite" goodness to prove that even it is limited by human frailty.

The Ontario production is at its best visually thanks again to Miss Moiseiwitsch's costumes, the most memorable of which transforms the Duke into a Christlike figure with a red beard and monk's habit. It is also beautifully

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spoken. What is lacking is a strong directorial viewpoint that might have molded this complicated comedy into absorbing drama. James Mason's Angelo starts as a grasping hypocrite, a kind of toned-down Tartuffe. In the scenes with Isabella he changes to fit more closely her assessment of him ("I partly think a due sincerity governed his deeds till he did look on me"). Finally in guilt he resembles King Claudius in "Hamlet," a man enslaved by guilt and power. Mr. Mason plays his part with a sullen physical passion that fails to penetrate the deep maze of evil with sufficient sharpness. Frances Hyland's Isabella is also a physically passionate one which presents her as a hot little teenager rather than the usual icy woman of virtue. In the scenes between the two subtlety and tension are too often sacrificed to the fast pace of comedy and the compulsion felt by director Cecil Clarke to have constant movement at all costs.

If the non-proscenium stage does dictate arbitrary movement to keep audiences on all three sides engrossed it is a serious drawback. Also a drawback is the fact that an actor at the front of the pseudo-Elizabethan stage is, when he is standing with his back to the center third of the audience, seen in profile by each of the two side thirds.

The remainder of the cast is extremely competent. Donald Harron is an impish Lucio, Douglas Campbell a boldly vulgar Pompey, and Robert Goodier Barrymoreishly funny as Barnardine the drunken prisoner who regrets he will be unable to die today. Trained by the Canadian Broadcasting Company and exhorted to the top standards set by Dr. Guthrie, the entire company performs with a uniform skill and technical sureness that one would be hard put to find in any American production. They make "Measure for Measure" an evening which constantly commands our eye and ear, if not enough our heart and brain.

THE Taming of the Shrew" is a most entertaining experiment in farce production. Dr. Guthrie, who has previously directed the play in Commedia dell Arte style has now thrown aside the last tiny bit of restraint and has permitted his actors to run wild. Using colloquial Midwestern accents and wearing Edwardian and Wild West costumes, they run through an almost complete catalogue of farce devices. This has some advantages. The Christopher Sly prologue leaves that garrulous comic bedded down at the front corner of the stage, and his frequent interruptions of the action are delightful reminders that the plot is

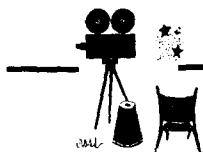
not to be taken too seriously. Also the subplot between Bianca and her suitors sparkles with mischief. And the Petruchio-Kate story is made more good-naturedly humorous by presenting him as a man who is really scared to death of her.

On this last point Dr. Guthrie confesses having made an error. During the run of the play to date he has felt a real disappointment on the part of the audience—and particularly its distaff members—that Petruchio is not the traditional strong man who beats Kate into submission.

However, to those willing to go along with any concept a director wishes to present a much more serious mistake has been made. The comic bits more often than not seem to occur without thought or reason. True farce is outrageous exaggeration, but not the "anything for a laugh" treatment. One actor exits with an enormous running broad-jump into one of the deep exit tunnels. At the wedding reception four chambermaids in Edwardian costumes dance the can-can to hoe-down music. And at one point Petruchio subdues Kate by spraying her with Flit. True, not all of the hokum is quite so zany. There are genuinely funny moments, such as the one where Kate's father surprises Petruchio while he is wrestling with Kate and Petruchio pretends to be dancing a tango with his violently unwilling partner. One feels that with more time, discipline, and logic an out-and-out farcical approach to "The Taming of the Shrew" might have worked admirably.

Indeed if "The Taming of the Shrew" has done not much else it has proved that an all-Canadian cast can do surprisingly well with slapstick techniques. As Sly, Robert Goodier comes close to achieving the drunk comic drollery of a Joe Jackson. William Needles plays Petruchio with a touch of Robert Woolsey. William Hutt is enormously funny as he complains of Kate calling her lute tutor "twangling Jack." And Frances Hyland is charming and pert as the merry little Bianca. Barbara Chilcott's Kate is perhaps a bit too serious for this production.

Whatever reservations one has about this second Stratford Festival and Dr. Guthrie's practical jokes, one must admit that the productions are expert and visually superb. Also by indulging in wide experimentation himself Dr. Guthrie is encouraging a host of Canadian actors to use their own ingenuity. There may be no better way to stimulate a truly Canadian comment on the classics, which is the first step towards the development of a Canadian nat^l.



SR GOES TO THE MOVIES

Making Sows' Ears from Silk Purses

JERRY LEWIS and his handsome friend Dean Martin represent at this moment one of the most valuable properties in show business. A measure of their drawing power in cafes is the fact that they offered Jules Podell \$60,000 to get out of a play-or-pay contract at the Copacabana, in New York. Podell refused, and his judgment was vindicated when the boys appeared and broke every previous record, including their own, in the fourteen-year history of the night club. When they played on the stage of the Paramount Theatre in New York some months ago they jammed the house, and then did between-show performances out of their dressing-room window for a mob of screaming kids on the sidewalk. In television their monthly shows astigmatize millions. *Motion Picture Daily's* poll shows them as the leading box-office attraction in films for 1953.

Yet the interesting fact is that Martin and Lewis have never made a good motion picture. The reason for this is simple: the motion-picture studio is the one place where Jerry Lewis has to stick reasonably close to the script.

Jerry Lewis is a performer of superb comic gifts who can caricature a character with a voice inflection or a gesture, but the essence of his appeal is violence and spontaneous madness. He has the art to stick a pin in a stuffed shirt, but he prefers to rip it off and tattoo his name on the wearer's chest. In saloons, in theatres, on television programs he does absolutely anything for a laugh. In the cafe act the funniest portion of the program consists of the destruction Lewis commits on Dick Stabile, their touring musical conductor, while the man is trying to play a straight number. He is never "off," he is always trying. I once saw him in a grandstand box at the Polo Grounds competing for attention with the Giants vs. Dodgers in the opening game of the season—and not doing badly.

Put this wild talent in a movie studio and what happens? I haven't been there, but I'll bet that the electricians, the carpenters, and the other actors fall down laughing between takes. Miles of celluloid must be spoiled. But it has not yet been proved possible to capture the same lunatic invention on film. Movies may be better than ever, but they still lack one thing that cafes, theatres, and tele-

vision do have, and that is spontaneity.

Only twice have I seen inspired violence captured on film: when Harpo Marx stamped the bald head of the passport inspector with his own stamp in "Monkey Business," and when W. C. Fields kicked Baby LeRoy in the seat of his three-cornered pants.

In "Living It Up," the movie version of "Hazel Flagg" (which in turn was the musical-comedy version of the film "Nothing Sacred"), the writers have tried to give Jerry Lewis his necessary breakaway scenes. For some obscure plot reason he has to pretend to be crazy, so he rides a crystal chandelier and plays "Bombs Away," throwing light bulbs at the heads of the folks down below. For another obscure plot reason he has to pretend to be three different doctors, one German, one Chinese, one French, all in the same operating-room scene, and the pushing of people through doors is like rush hour at Grand Central. For no reason at all he participates in a jitterbug dance sequence with an alarming young lady named Sheree North. It is plain that these were intended to be the high points of the film, because this kind of thing is the high point of Jerry Lewis's comedy. I have to report that they are forced, they are meaningless, they are dreadful.

The people in charge of making bad new movies out of good old movies have been fairly active of late. They made a bad movie out of "The Awful Truth." They made a bad movie out of "The Shop Around the Corner." And they have now made a bad movie out of "Nothing Sacred." In this masterpiece of the 1930's the person who became radioactive was Carole Lombard. It is possible that you are not one of those people who behave like a melted cheese sandwich when the name of Carole Lombard is mentioned. If you are not, you may now leave the room. If you remain, you will remember that there was a kind of raffish innocence, a crack-voiced, wide-eyed wickedness about this girl which helped make "Nothing Sacred" a delicious comment on the foibles of the big city and its newspapers. "Living It Up" is not a comment on anything except the difficulty of capturing the quality of Jerry Lewis in a movie.

It should be noted that the other half of the team of Dean Martin and

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