



BROADWAY POSTSCRIPT

What Every Lady Learns

"Portrait of a Lady" William Archibald's adaptation of the 900-page Henry James novel, can perhaps best be described as a cameo reel. In it Mr. Archibald has faithfully spliced together isolated frames from almost every chapter (except the last), but very seldom does the play accumulate any momentum of its own. Since the first half of the novel is devoted to "putting some wind in the sails" of its heroine, Mr. Archibald's deficiency is in part the passing on of an aspect of the original. Yet wouldn't he have been better advised to confine the stage action to the more dramatic second half, in which Isabel Archer is tested in the crucible of a malignant marriage, and to build the entire play around these episodes of revelation? Possibly, since Henry James was a unique novelist, an unconventional technique should be found to bring the novelist's fine but not theatrically-tailored dialogue into more focus.

Failing these things we can only hope to find a rare and accomplished actress who can express simultaneously the outward grace and inner torment of Isabel Archer. Such an actress Jennifer Jones in her Broadway debut is not. And, in general, the supporting cast never succeeds in creating much of a base for the highly-polished and enigmatic surface that James left them. True, James felt that it was difficult to know very much about anyone, but this is of no help to actors working in a realistic tradition. There is, nevertheless, one effective performance by Cathleen Nesbitt as the Countess Gemini. Being pretty much outside the sensitive zone of the story, she is free to make quips at the expense of the others. "What did he say in the letter?" she asks Isabel. "Nothing," replies the heroine in a ladylike effort to keep her troubles leashed. "What an odd letter!" says the Countess with a knowing grin that echoes the theatre-goers' own attitude towards a play that seems determined not to let them know what it's all about.

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To see what a rare and accomplished actress *can* do with a play that is more old-fashioned if less un-theatrical than "Portrait of a Lady" one has only to visit the City Center and watch Helen Hayes cut capers in J. M. Barrie's "What Every Woman

Knows." As Maggie Wylie, the plain but canny woman who makes the perfect complement to a humorless but ambitious husband, Miss Hayes plays each situation with marvelous unreticence. She challenges and vanquishes the white knight of sentimentality, whom most actresses consider their essential ally in any Barrie play. She observes at all times the contrast between the practical and the romantic. She seems never a girl in love with a man, but rather a prospective wife who sees in her marriage the chance of doing something more interesting and valuable than wizening and drying up in the Pans. Even in her burst of romanticism, when she offers the still single John Shand a chance to withdraw from his financially motivated agreement to marry her, Miss Hayes makes us feel that she does not tear up the contract until she is sure that his pride in keeping his word is still more binding.

After the marriage Miss Hayes does not let us down. Maggie wears the pants in the Shand family, but her desperate concern is to keep them hidden under her modest petticoat. Feverishly she protects her work on his behalf, and more feverishly still she contrives to defeat the beautiful young lady who falls in love with what she has helped him become. But most feverishly of all she overcomes a friend's interference which has revealed to Shand the part Maggie has been playing in his career. In this scene Miss Hayes darts about the room until she finds a place where she can stand face-to-the-wall in embarrassment. This is farcical exaggeration but delightful amusement.

There are many reasons why Helen Hayes was the ideal actress to play the thirty-three-year-old Maggie when she first revived it twenty-seven years ago. There are even more why she now is ideal for a Maggie whose age has been arbitrarily increased to thirty-nine. There is her Yankee-Scottish "I-take-nothing-for-granted" toughness, made innocently charming by her diminutive stature and her unabashed proclamation of small weaknesses. There are her speed and timing reminiscent of an electric cash-register. And there is her ability to inflect an ordinary line into a very special shape.

"How is everybody?" she asks casually, but her *everybody* can only refer to one specific fact about one specific person. —HENRY HEWES.

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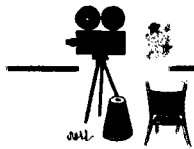
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Bigger and Broadway Business

THE big picture trend at the West Coast dream works is taking a Ziegfeldian, or monster-musical, turn. There is little attempt these days to integrate music with book, to conform to the modern musical-play custom of using a song as a heightened form of the statement the actor is likely to make at that dramatic moment in the story. In the current offerings we are back with the plumed and beaded musicals of the past, which were, in the succinct phrase of the period, all dressed up with no place to go.

Both "Deep in My Heart" (M-G-M) and "There's No Business Like Show Business" (Twentieth Century-Fox) are loaded to the Plimsoll line with top stars and hit tunes, both are enormous and frequently satisfactory entertainments, and both suffer from an inadequacy of writing as monumental as their budgets.

"Deep in My Heart," a film biography of operetta composer Sigmund Romberg, offers the protean Jose Ferrer in the leading role, surrounds him with Helen Traubel, Doe Avedon, Merle Oberon, and Paul Stewart, and throws in guest-star appearances by Rosemary Clooney, Gene Kelly and brother Fred, Vic Damone and Jane Powell, William Olvis, Cyd Charisse, Tamara Toumanova, Ann Miller, Howard Keel, Tony Martin, and Joan Weldon, or just about every M-G-M player who can whistle, hum, or do a time-step.

The story is one of those "and-then-I-wrote" song-bags from the works of Vienna's patron saint of baritones. Ferrer interprets Romberg as an opinionated chap who writes and plays *Wiener Schnitzel* waltzes in a Second Avenue cafe operated by Helen Traubel. Unable to sell his *schmalz*, he breaks into the theatre writing ragtime nonsense for the Shuberts, eventually persuades them to present an American Viennese opera called "Maytime," goes on to write "The Student Prince," "New Moon," "The Desert Song," and a half-dozen others. On the way he marries a charming and presumably rich young lady played by Doe Avedon and does not marry a charming and chic lyric writer played with matchless style by Merle Oberon. After a while the theatrical procession moves past him, his shows are failures, and he begins the concert-personal appearance tours

which were to occupy him until his death.

There is a trailing off to this narrative which gives the last half of the film a dying fall, but the musical plums along the way make this a fairly tasty Christmas pie.

Of the guest-star appearances the most effective is made by Cyd Charisse, singing "One Alone" and following it with an inflammatory *pas de deux* partnered by James Mitchell. Other highlights include a tantalizingly brief glimpse of the ballerina Toumanova playing a French fireball named Gaby Deslys, Tony Martin pouring the soothing syrup of his voice into "Lover Come Back to Me," and the amiable Helen Traubel singing "Softly as in a Morning Sunrise."

To this musical *olla podrida* Ferrer has added his own *tour de force*, a ten-minute bit in which he describes the utterly insane book of a Jolson musical called "Jazzadoo," acting out all the parts, flinging himself out the window, and finishing with a black-face imitation of Jolson charging an audience on his knees.

"There's No Business Like Show Business" is another experiment in the giant economy size. Stars include Ethel Merman, Dan Dailey, Johnnie Ray, Donald O'Connor, Mitzi Gaynor, and, for lagniappe, the intergalactically renowned, pneumatic Marilyn Monroe. "TNBSB" could easily have been a king-sized bore, for there is a relentless lack of imagination in the staging of many of the numbers, there is an embarrassing passage about Johnnie Ray entering the priesthood and giving his acrobatic all to a number called "If You Believe," and there is an all-out attempt to shatter the eardrums with "Alexander's Ragtime Band," sung and danced in American, German, Scotch, French, and Johnnie Ray.

This Irving Berlin film is happily rescued by the master's score and by the performances. Donald O'Connor is learning the Crosby trick of throwing it away, and he is a charmer, especially in "A Man Chases a Girl." Mitzi Gaynor and Dan Dailey are useful hands around such an undertaking. Marilyn Monroe, playing an ambitious cutie, demonstrates a husky talent for song-and-dance numbers, with special marks for a song called "Lazy." If they would stop working so hard to make this girl sexy Twentieth

might discover Miss Monroe is a good actress with authentic comic gifts.

The stalwart of the company is Ethel Merman. Cameraman Leon Shamroy is not as kind to her as he was in "Call Me Madam," but this is a lady with brass in her voice. When she steps out on the stage alone and brays "There's No Business Like Show Business" they can leave the cast of thousands in the wings.

Johnnie Ray's screen appearance reveals an actor still crude, but with an engaging boyish manner. When he sings he puts out so much that a certain excitement is created, even though so much is so bad.

The film presents one extraordinary innovation. Instead of the vaudeville family having its big sentimental success at the Palace, this group is a hit at the Hippodrome. It's not much, but it shows they're thinking out there.

* * *

"The Game of Love" (Shelton Films) is a French film taken from the Colette novel "Le Ble En Herbe." It seemed to me a fairly standard Continental rendering of the agonies of adolescence, including a boy and girl living together as brother and sister but knowing they are not, the mysterious woman in white who introduces boy to the mysteries of the flesh, the painful and poetic discovery of passion by the young people. The most poignant moment comes as Paul and Vinca take leave of the Brittany seacoast, where this drama has occupied their summer. Claude Autant-Lara, the director, has managed to catch a gray sky and the two small figures in dark sweaters on the rocky beach to form a composition of wistful drama. It is an image charged with the pleasure and pain of coming of age. There are striking performances by Nicole Berger, Pierre-Michel Beck, and Edwige Feuillere.

* * *

"Young at Heart" (Warner Brothers) proves that Hollywood has not lost its knack for making indifferent new pictures out of good old pictures. This is a remake of "Four Daughters" with one daughter missing, Frank Sinatra in the old John Garfield cynic-at-the-piano part, and Doris Day playing whichever one of the Lane Sisters broke her heart over him. Miss Day delivers a fresh-faced and warmhearted performance. Sinatra, although he smokes enough cigarettes for six cynics, doesn't burst from the screen with the old Garfield excitement, but he obliges with "Just One of Those Things" and "Someone to Watch Over Me" to carry us along the way.

—LEE ROGOW.