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## BROADWAY POSTSCRIPT

## A FRANK MARRIEDWELL STORY

**W**HEN "Damn Yankees" is sticking to baseball it is an unbelievably good musical comedy. When it is not it is pretty much bush-league. Written by George Abbott and Douglass Wallop after the latter's slight novel, "The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant," it focuses on Joe Boyd, a fifty-year-old married baseball fan whose team, the Washington Senators, hasn't won a pennant in twenty-five years. This constant frustration of Joe's vicarious hopes plus the humdrum nature of his existence has made him irritable. Suddenly, in strolls the devil, alias a Red Barberish-looking character named Applegate. In exchange for his soul Applegate offers Boyd the opportunity to change into Joe Hardy, a long-ball-hitting sensation who can spark the Senators out of the second division and into the World Series. Boyd accepts, but insists on an escape clause in the contract (how much this one switch tells us about the difference between Dr. Faustus' age and our own!). The moment of transition from the tired weak-voiced Joe Boyd to the young powerful Joe Hardy is tremendously effective.

Even more glorious is the next scene, which features three crushed Senator ballplayers and their manager singing what should become a comedy classic for all locker-room quartettes, "We've got HEART." Then, this scene is topped by the moment in front of the dugout when the incredulous Washington players watch Joe Hardy try out for the team. The gleeful romp that ensues is a masterpiece of satire with special thematic use being made of the ballplayers' mincing swagger. So far, so good. And now comes a new plot twist named Lola. Whatever arbitrariness there is in her introduction into the story is forgiven by the fact that she is played by the red-haired soubrette Gwen Verdon. Her first slyly seductive number, "A Little Brains—A Little Talent, with Emphasis on the Latter," foreshadows coming events. For, two songs later, Miss Verdon mimics a Georgia Sothern-type striptease which places considerable emphasis on the latter. But, because her personality is essentially friendly and funny, Miss Verdon is at her best in a mock-mambo performed from under the lid of a pulled down straw hat with the personable Eddie Phillips as her partner.

In addition, there is a delightfully droll second-act opening in which the ballplayers discuss the girls they have let slip away, because at the moment when a delicious opportunity presented itself they "thought about the game."

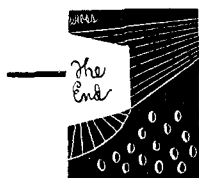
Unfortunately, a good part of the show is relatively inert, and tune-makers Richard Adler and Jerry Ross have failed to come up with a strong score to bolster their fine comedy numbers. Whenever Joe becomes concerned with the "dear old girl" he has deserted for baseball the show becomes empty. Ray Walston is a wonderfully unaffected Devil who disdains ballet antics. He has one wonderful moment in which he replies to an autograph hound's question, "Are you *anybody*?" with a scornful, "Not a soul." Yet a great deal of his material seems a painfully ordinary variation of the same old Mephistophelean joke.

Despite these metaphorical "bases on balls," "Damn Yankees" gets itself out of trouble with George Abbott's blazing fast ball, Bob Fosse's screwball choreographic relief, the superb double-play combination of scene-designers William and Jean Eckart, whose dugout set is the best musical-comedy scenery of the year, and, of course, an occasional low curve from "the young redhead."

\* \* \*

If "Damn Yankees" makes the ball fan's dream of glory come true, so does Roald Dahl's new comedy, "The Honeys," provide a sumptuous repast of wish-fulfilment for every rooster-pecked wife. However, this is about all the author has to serve, and the moments when Hume Cronyn is off-stage changing his make-up from the miserly shuffleboarding Mr. Honey to his gluttonous and snide twin brother are neither distinguished nor very funny. Jessica Tandy seems miscast as the mousy wife, and Dorothy Stickney seems able to use only a small part of her talents as the other more callous mate. However, Mr. Cronyn's wry portrayals of the two curmudgeons are so beautifully drawn that we rejoice when things go agley and each must be remurdered. Mr. Cronyn proves that "The Honeys" can be Actors' Delight when played on the level of pure farce.

—HENRY HEWES.



## SR GOES TO THE MOVIES

## ASTAIRE, ADVENTURE, AND THE A-BOMB

THERE are few film stars more perfect in their art, more delightful to watch, or easier to admire than Fred Astaire. He never really acts. He doesn't have to. That self-deprecatory grin he generally wears translates immediately its perplexity, chagrin, or a stammering declaration of love. It's the things his body does that are so extraordinary. As he slopes along with his jaunty, springy step he seems eternally poised on the verge of a dance. The self-conscious gestures that accompany his words come out almost apologetically, as if they had not yet been formulated into a complete ballet. Every movement, every action is charged with an electric grace and precision. He can't pick up a hat, ring for an elevator, answer a telephone without communicating a tremendous sense of joy and vitality. Movement to Astaire is as natural, as spontaneous as breathing—and movement is what the movies live upon. It would be foolish to describe him as a natural-born actor; essentially he is the ideal film personality, and as such even more rare.

"Daddy Long Legs" (20th Century-Fox) gives Astaire one of his best opportunities in ages to display both his peculiar charm and his dancing skill. Its spun-sugar story of an aging millionaire and his anonymous philanthropy for an appealing teen-age orphan has been cannily tailored by Phoebe and Harry Ephron to fit him in every respect. And with winsome Leslie Caron cast as the orphan, Astaire has a dancing partner wholly worthy of his talent. Their numbers together—notably an adroit "Guardian Angel" ballet and a gay, imaginative whirl through the New York nightclubs—rank with the best things he has ever done.

\* \* \*

There is dancing too, but of quite a different order, in a handsome new travel film on South America, "Green Magic" (IFE). Taken by the Italian explorer-adventurer Count Leonardo Bonzi in the course of a six-month motor trip through Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, Bolivia, and Peru, it includes a weird Afro-Indian *macumba*—a voodoo ritual dance that achieves its climax in tumultuous mass-hysteria—and a fascinating Peruvian wedding ceremonial dance, a curious blending of stately Indian steps and

whirling Spanish fandango. But the photographers on the Bonzi expedition by no means confine their attention to simply the picturesque. At one point they pause to observe the fight to the death between two monster snakes, another time they cover the crossing of a herd of cattle through a swift stream infested with *piranhas*—a crossing made possible only by the horrifying sacrifice of a live steer to the bloodthirsty fish. All in all, however, "Green Magic" stands as one of the most beautiful and authentic travel films ever shown theatrically.

\* \* \*

In "Hiroshima" (Continental) we are able, for the first time in this country, to obtain a glimpse of Japanese film makers at work on a contemporary theme. And if this picture is at all indicative the current renaissance of Japan's film industry is not confined exclusively to the *jidai-geki*, the period pieces. "Hiroshima," while lacking the artistic balance and sureness that characterized the great works we have already seen, shares with them their intensity of mood and emotion. It would be difficult for a film on this grave theme not to. It begins on August 5, 1945—the day before the first atomic bomb was dropped upon that ill-fated city. Stock footage integrated with enacted sequences shows the people at work, at home, in school.

All of this is told dispassionately, without protest, without sensationalism, without cheap appeals for pity. In fact, the film's sole note of overt criticism is directed against the Japanese military—first for its brutal discipline of civilians, and then for its refusal to adopt effective anti-radiation measures for fear of alarming the populace. It ends with a prayer, in which surely all of us can join, that the horror visited on Hiroshima will never occur again anywhere. For when we have understood the effects of such a bomb not as abstract statistics, but in the agonies of flesh and blood, further recourse to atomic warfare becomes inconceivable. It is that spirit which animates this shocking film. —ARTHUR KNIGHT.

## LITERARY I.Q. ANSWERS

Column Two should read: 17, 10, 1, 2, 9, 16, 18, 11, 3, 20, 8, 19, 15, 4, 7, 12, 5, 14, 13, 6.

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