



SR GOES TO THE MOVIES

Comic Renaissance

FOR the longest time now we have been harboring the suspicion that Hollywood had forgotten how to make comedies, suspicions that were dankly confirmed by the outpourings of such professional funny men as Jerry Lewis, Bob Hope, and Abbott-Costello. Oh, they were still making with the gags—right in there pitching, in fact. But the gags lacked any cutting edge. Indeed, apart from a handful of Judy Holliday films, it is difficult to recall any truly topical comedies in recent years—nothing to compare with, say, George Stevens's hilarious spoof on Washington's wartime housing shortage, "The More the Merrier."

Well, if two new films can be taken as straws in the wind we are due for a change. The boldness that has recently penetrated other areas of film making seems to be liberating the comedy writers as well. And no mistake about it, it does take a certain amount of boldness to be impudent about Things That Matter—even if the Things are no more basic than labor relations in a musical-comedy pajama factory or the high-powered lunacies of Madison Avenue. Of course, "The Pajama Game" (Warner Bros.) was imported virtually intact from a long and successful run on Broadway. But the chances are that as little as three years ago there would have been serious head-shakings about taking on a property whose heroine was chairlady of a union's grievance committee and whose climax was a labor rally celebrating a 7½¢ pay raise wrung from a reluctant employer. "Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?" (Twentieth Century-Fox) is also an importee, but so thoroughly revised by Frank Tashlin, who adapted, directed, and produced this screen version of George Axelrod's play, that it stands as virtually an original. Both are guaranteed to produce a more satisfying form of laughter than any film you have seen this year.

"The Pajama Game" gains its humor from such unlikely sources as pitting its union chairlady against the handsome plant supervisor both romantically and economically, from an irascible time-study expert who used to throw knives in vaudeville, from factory speed-ups photographed in fast motion and union slow-downs taken in slow motion. In short, it begins with a reasonably exact facsimile of an ordinary factory and builds

from there. Of course, the girls behind the sewing machines are a good deal prettier—and sing and dance better—than would probably be the case in any ordinary factory; but this is a musical, and those girls are needed. They are needed for some of Bob Fosse's best choreography to date.

Although the stars of the film, Doris Day and John Raitt, are primarily singers, Fosse has resourcefully come up with routines that make their normal, healthy athleticism seem like dancing—particularly in their energetic rendition of "I Love You More." Add to this the lovely old vaudeville patina of Eddie Foy, Jr.'s every movement and Carol Haney's pixie clowning and you have all the ingredients you could wish for in a lively, first-rate musical. Unfortunately, "The Pajama Game" is at its best only in musical moments. Co-directors George Abbott and Stanley Donen have held the intermediate action so close to the stage original that one can almost feel the curtains opening and closing. But once the music starts the cameras roll free, the cast limbers up, and everything is just fine.

THE fun in "Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?" gets under way the moment the familiar Fox trade-mark appears on the screen. Tony Randall is mounted on the big block letters blowing the trumpets, playing the viol, beating the drum to supply the accompanying musical flourishes. "A contract player has to be able to do everything these days," he explains. Then, alongside the credits, comes a wonderfully screwy series of take-offs on TV commercials. And later in the picture there is a special intermission, a complete break in the story, "for all those who are accustomed to seeing their movies on television." This pleasantly irreverent attitude toward both the movies and TV pervades the story as well, a travesty on Hollywood's publicity-hungry glamour queens and Madison Avenue's gilt-ridden ad factories. Frank Tashlin's knowing script is filled with bright, risqué lines and situations, all handled with surprising effectiveness by Jayne Mansfield (who, one might say, really lives her role). But the lad to keep your eye on is Tony Randall. As a harassed copywriter turned international "lover boy," he shapes up as the most promising young comic of the decade.

—ARTHUR KNIGHT.

RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL

Showplace of the Nation
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CI 6-4600

"THE PAJAMA GAME"

Starring

DORIS DAY

**JOHN RAITT • CAROL HANEY
EDDIE FOY, JR.**

With

RETA SHAW • BARBARA NICHOLS

Produced and Directed by

**GEORGE • STANLEY
ABBOTT • DONEN**

**A Warner Bros. Picture
in WarnerColor**

**ON THE
GREAT STAGE**

**"MOODS
and MUSIC"**

Produced by Russell Markert,
with the Rockettes, Corps de
Ballet, Choral Ensemble . . .
Symphony Orchestra, under
the direction of Raymond Paige.

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Old Shores and New Scores in Door County

EPHRAIM, WISCONSIN.

TAXING as it is to his ingenuity, the human animal never seems to run out of ways to surprise his fellow man. In New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, or Los Angeles, where conditions are anything but ideal, music is played out-of-doors in summer time. On beautiful Door Peninsula, where nature smiles on every side and rolling woodlands debate whether to roll down to Green Bay or to Lake Michigan (along either side of the "Thumb"), music lovers go indoors to hear Thor Johnson conduct the concerts of the Peninsula Music Festival.

As music director of the Cincinnati Symphony (one of the few Americans to achieve such an exalted estate), Johnson would seem a long way from home in the festival identified with Fish Creek. However, Johnson's forbears were among the early Norse settlers of this area, and he was himself born in Wisconsin Rapids. Hence he is devoting his considerable energies to tilling soil close to him in this festival now in its fifth year. The soil itself is not without preparation, for a Peninsula Arts Association of rather long lineage looks forward to a time when the region will blossom (in season) with artistic activities as it does now with cherries. Long ago the late Frederick Stock summered in Fish Creek, and had a dream of making it the summer home of his Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

Amid the dreams of the past and the hopes for the future the present, however, insists on intruding its practical problems. There is no ceiling to the ambitions of conductor Johnson, his supporters, and their enthusiastic audience; but there is a decidedly tangible one on the gymnasium-auditorium of Gibraltar High School, which the festival presently calls home. It is a typically modern structure in the open country which doubtless serves its primary purpose admirably. It also has an unparalleled opportunity to bake all day in the warm Wisconsin sun. The evening breezes which make the peninsula a vacationer's dream give more comfort to the parked cars without than to their sweltering owners within.

It is local gossip that a bevy of powerful fans (installed since last year's concerts) were inexplicably roofed over when the school authori-

ties undertook to redecorate the gymnasium on behalf of the summer activities. With or without their assistance, however, the present structure is simply not suited for music-making on any consequential scale. For those nearby, it doubtless presents a gratifying, even a stimulating way of spending a summer's evening. But Johnson is both a serious musician and an enterprising one, as his programs attest. At present, the reasons for visiting the Peninsula Music Festival have more to do with the peninsula than with the music festival. In a nation rich with beauty spots from Cape Cod to Redlands Grove, from Tanglewood to Aspen, Door Peninsula has the blessings of nature plus the improvements of man to challenge any. (Milwaukee is four hours' drive away, Chicago accessible in six or seven along excellent roads.)

The orchestra Johnson has imported (Cincinnatians are strongly represented—New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia providing others) shows many excellent players and some brilliant ones. Charles Moore of Philadelphia, for example, is a first-class reed man, whose English horn solos in Sibelius's "Pelleas et Melisande" suite were played with fine artistry as well as beautiful tone. Beethoven's "Prometheus" overture had a properly centered C major sound which was echoed in the "Triple Concerto" which brought the opening program to an end.

Here the aspirations of the project came into sharp conflict with the practicalities of the surroundings. For his soloists, Johnson provided the Beaux Arts Trio, of which Daniel Guilet, longtime concertmaster of the NBC Symphony under Arturo Toscanini, is the violinist; Menahem Pressler, the pianist, and Bernard Greenhouse the cellist. The smallish orchestra conducted by Johnson occupied the confining stage, the trio perched on a platform in front. The performance, in effect, had two conductors, for Guilet was visible to both the trio and the orchestra, whereas Johnson had his back to the soloists. Beethoven's scoring of this work is, at best, experimental; and it did not prove out in this performance. Both entities had qualities of musicianship (Pressler's are almost too assertive for ensemble service), but a real blend was an acoustical impossibility.

An abiding feature of the Peninsula Music Festival since its inception has been the production of new works suitable for performance by the orchestra of about forty. Among them have been several commissions, of which Vittorio Giannini's "Divertimento" has been successful enough to merit re-performance since its premiere in 1953. Among the works of Beethoven and Sibelius at the opening concert it left no rift of interest, commanding special admiration for its charming *Andante espressivo*.

For his first commission of the 1957 festival, Johnson presented a "Divertimento Burlesca" of Benjamin Lees, a California-based composer of Russian parentage (he was born in Harbin, Manchuria), who has attracted attention with several fluently written scores, especially his Quartet No. 1. I had not heard an orchestral work of his before, but this one showed him inclined to the tartness of early Prokofiev, especially in a scherzoso *moderato e sardonico*, with a busy ostinato of puckered bassoon phrases. It was preceded by a moody, well-written slow movement (a nocturne with somewhat ominous overtones) and, to start with, a compact first movement of clean-cut formal design. The scherzo seems a kind of *cul-de-sac* in this piece, for its strongly defined qualities made the finale something of an anti-climax.

Johnson's full afternoon of music began with a J. C. Bach Sinfonia Concertina in E flat, continued with Mahler's "Kindertotenlieder," and concluded with Falla's "Amor Brujo." The soloist for the last two of these was Lillian Chookasian, whose full-blooded mezzo was somewhat beyond her control in the low register. She is a good musician and an earnest performer but not yet in command of stylistic subtlety in such music.

Taken altogether, a week-end on Door Peninsula should begin with an admission charge on leaving Sturgeon Bay, for it is a keen pleasure to travel its well-kept roads, absorb the ever-changing vistas of blue waters and green woodlands, inhale its soft yet stimulating air. It offers any kind of housing one could ask, from campsites to modern motels to excellently staffed hotels. The old shores of the peninsula are memorable, and so are some of the new scores heard at the Peninsula Music Festival. Whether its isolation would forbid support of a major festival is a question for the future; but there is little doubt that the natural surroundings merit one. For the present, however, promotion had better be no more than mezzo-forte and in a minor key.

—IRVING KOLODIN.