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BROADWAY POSTSCRIPT

"Kicks" vs. Kids—A Draw

IN HIS first play, "A Hole in the Head," Arnold Schulman begins with a fine objective: to explore the dilemma between man's need for adventure and his need for home and children. With admirable accuracy the thirty-two-year-old playwright draws Sidney, a lying irresponsible widower who "played around" while his beloved wife was still alive and whose only conventional virtue is a not utterly selfish affection for a ten-year-old son.

The play focuses on the question of whether this "forty-two-year-old child" will remarry for his son's sake or will continue to drift. The contest is surrounded by characters who have already made their choices: a sensuous good-time girl who has perhaps the greatest moral strength of all in that she recognizes outright her parasitic position in society and her obligation not to mess up the lives of others; Sidney's rich brother Max, who lives joylessly amid enforced domesticity at its most vulgar; Max's wife Sophie, whose cloying excess of sentiment is weighed against good-heartedness and human responsiveness; and finally a pretty and sensitive widow, whose loneliness and desperation have steered her to accept almost any man who will confer on her wifehood and motherhood.

Having made this honest and intelligent selection of characters, Mr. Schulman writes a play that alternates between farce and naturalistic drama. As farce there are some excellent bits. The eccentricities of life in a Miami motel provide a few laughs; the arguments between Sidney and Max are healthy Jewish humor, a sort of updated Smith-and-Dale. But while out-and-out farce is a legitimate approach to a dramatic situation, it should not be weakened by being mixed with sober moments of naturalism. And even naturalistic drama owes the playgoer the service of catching the essence of daily living's dullness without being dull and petty itself. After an audience has done all the work of reliving the commonplace, "A Hole in the Head" leaves it with an ending that might well be followed by "Will Sidney marry Mrs. Rogers? Tune in tomorrow."

Garson Kanin expertly relieves the play's details with comic invention. Under his direction David Burns becomes a rip-roaring tintype of the

"buried alive" businessman who expresses in one marvelous line the futility of trying to wed a sentimental nepotism to a hard-boiled capitalism. "Albert?" he queries. "In the house he's my son. In the store he's a tumor." You will laugh uncontrollably when this ingrown misanthrope shows his affection for young Alvin by giving the child's arm a painful twist. And he wrings a laugh out of a simple line like "He won't get married," by the perfectly timed gesture that accompanies it. Indeed, Max seems far and away the most interesting character in the play. As his wife, Kay Medford contributes the latest in a long string of amusing dialect portrayals. And Connie Sawyer, who does a hilarious bit of nonsense with a laughing-drunk pantomime, is sure-fire diversion.

With the more serious characters, Lee Grant as the lonely widow who realistically fights down the embarrassment of the present moment in order to achieve the permanent solution is the most compelling and memorable. Tommy White does a fine job in playing young Alvin, neither too precocious nor too charming despite many opportunities for cuteness. Joyce Van Patten extends the range of her talent to fill out the role of Sidney's voluptuous playmate.

Paul Douglas, the play's star, is somewhat disappointing as Sidney. While physically right for the part, and courageous enough to keep the character relatively unsympathetic, Mr. Douglas seems unable to resolve the conflicting pulls of humor and serious emotion. One feels that he would have been better off if he had steered in one direction. So perhaps would "A Hole in the Head."

IN THE field of musical productions, I can recommend "Clown Face," now playing Saturday and Sunday matinees at Theatre East, as pleasant and effective children's entertainment despite its dubious moral that tears can move a nasty old witch into benevolence.

On the other hand, "Ziegfeld Follies" is unfit consumption for anyone. There are a few sporadic delights provided by Beatrice Lillie and dancers Harold Lang and Helen Wood, but these tend to dissolve in the submediocre material that surrounds them.

—HENRY HEWES.



SR GOES TO THE MOVIES

CinemaScope Without Tears

EVER since the CinemaScope cameras came into existence a few years back, they have been used to lend pictorial embellishment to rather banal little love stories set against such photogenic backdrops as Rome, Paris, North Africa, or India. Invariably there has been some point in the picture when the director tossed away his script entirely and simply filled the screen with scenic views of the countryside. At such moments it became almost too clear that the whole point of the plot was the excuse it provided to spread forth these vistas of exotic and beautiful lands. In "Lost Continent" (Lopert), the first feature-length CinemaScope travel film, Count Leonardo Bonzi has very sensibly dropped all pretext. For Bonzi, the distinguished adventurer-explorer who made "Green Magic," is well aware of the special excitement and fascination of distant lands when photographed by skilled cameramen and sensitive film makers. In his earlier travelogue, a 7,800-mile trek across Brazil, he revealed an almost unique combination of scientific curiosity, poetic expression, and showmanship. In "Lost Continent," an anthropological exploration of the Malayan Archipelago, he adds to these qualities a rare instinct for composing gracefully within the ungainly shape imposed by the CinemaScope screen.

The result, as might be expected, goes far beyond the ordinary, or Fitzpatrick, realm of travel films. Its concern is never the merely picturesque, a superficial editing together of natural wonders and touristic trivia. Bonzi's primary interest is in the people of the fabulous world south of Hong Kong. And while John Gunther's commentary alludes rather glibly to their "new liberty," what the camera presents is essentially a record of rituals and life patterns that have endured for countless generations.

* * *

Supplementing "Lost Continent" on its cross-country openings is a charming half-hour fantasy from France titled "The Red Balloon." Directed by Albert Lamorisse, whose "White Mane" was shown on "Omnibus" a few weeks ago, the film repeats virtually the same story pattern. In "White Mane" a little boy makes friends with a horse, almost loses him to a band of hard-hearted ranchers and in the end leaps with the horse

into the sea. In Lamorisse's latest film, the friendship is between a boy and a large balloon—and a lovely, animate, tender relationship it is. Against the blue-grey streets of Menilmontant, boy and balloon gain confidence in each other, play games together, and elude the pack of urchins who want to destroy the balloon. Eventually they succeed, however, and the death of the toy is made as painful and affecting as the wanton killing of a human being. One is tempted to read all sorts of meanings into this—the world's jealous destruction of fantasy and illusion, the end of childish innocence. But it can also be taken and enjoyed as simply the lovely image of a child's dream, an image whose special enchantment lies in its superb color shots of the streets, the shops, and crumbling tenement flats of Paris.

* * *

"Stella" (Joseph Burstyn) is the work of a young Greek director, Michael Cacoyannis, who has begun to attract considerable attention among European cinéastes. In this, his second film, he demonstrates that there is ample reason for their enthusiasm. "Stella" reveals the same harsh, uncompromising, unprettified sense of reality that distinguished the first outcroppings of Italian neo-realism, the same desire to search out life with the camera and throw it on the screen without apology or moral stricture. Its heroine, excitingly played by Melina Mercouri, is a singer in a cheap open-air nightclub, a girl who wants men, not marriage. Like Carmen, her appetites lead first to the destruction of her lovers and, ultimately, to her own death as well. All of this Cacoyannis has conveyed without any attempt to glamorize his heroine or to turn her into a conventional *femme fatale*. He thrusts his camera close to her strong, sensual face, and her passions are written nakedly upon it. So, too, is her torment when confronted with the death of a former lover, her conflict when the man she truly loves insists on shackling her in marriage. By setting his story almost entirely in the streets, the cafés, the markets, and the ugly tenement flats of working-class Athens Cacoyannis has given it an added dimension of reality, and an earthy folk quality by incorporating a considerable number of popular Greek songs and dances.

—ARTHUR KNIGHT.

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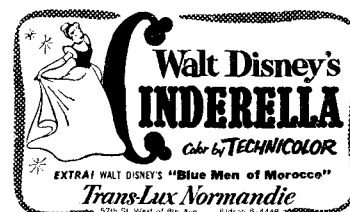
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