

Of Senators and Cabinet Members

ON THE surface, "Advise and Consent" would seem to be the film that American critics have been demanding these many years—bold, contemporary, significant. It handles controversial material with zest, and puts on the screen a portrait of Washington's upper echelons, both social and political, immediately recognizable to any newspaper reader. Indeed, despite the conventional disclaimer that "any resemblance . . . is purely coincidental," many viewers will find it (as did the readers of Allen Drury's original novel) a kind of *roman à clef*; and part of the fun is assigning real-life names to cinematic roles.

Part of the fun, too, is watching Otto Preminger's newsreel-like photography as he moves his camera through Senate chambers, Washington mansions, and the White House itself. Playing close to his characters, he seems constantly on the prowl, anticipating their movements, surprising them in their gestures. One has a sense of discovery, of coming upon these people at their most intimate and revealing moments. The camera action, always intricate, achieves virtuoso brilliance in the picture's final shot, a piece of film that runs more than three minutes and embraces everything from extreme close-ups to an eloquent long-shot from above as the Senate adjourns.

But good shooting never made a good movie; it can only help. And Preminger's film, with its plethora of characters, needs lots of help. Transitions are abrupt. Scenes often seem to have been truncated in order to switch to another part of the forest (or jungle) of Washington. And there is always a feeling of calculation about the picture—as if Preminger had said, "We need a little sex here, and let's hit the homosexuality there. If we throw in a scene of a pansy bar, it's bound to start talk. And this Van Ackerman—we don't want to make him too much like the late Joe McCarthy, but if we give him some business with a pipe, at least somebody will get the idea. . . ."

As a consequence, for all their surface realism, the scenes have an artificial ring to them. Preminger, expert that he is, pulls the strings, but what jumps are puppets instead of people. Perhaps, at least in part, this is the result of Wendell Mayes's screenplay. Faced with the problem of reducing Drury's huge novel to a playable length, he has had to capsule by coming upon characters when they are making significant state-

ments. Preminger as producer might have minimized this; but Preminger as director obviously relished playing each scene for all it is worth.

And what is it worth, in the long run? The picture, for all its air of exposé, proves to be as normal and blueberry pie as "State Fair." The dying President has sent to the Senate for approval a man he genuinely admires and respects, despite his red-tainted youth; the ineffectual Vice-President assumes the dignity of his office the moment the mantle has fallen upon him; the curmudgeonly Senator from South Carolina retires in good grace after the Senator from Utah's suicide; the Majority Leader, the Senator from Michigan, clasps the South Carolina Senator's hand and tells him that the Senate needs more reactionaries like him; and the Junior Senator from Wyoming, clearly patterned after McCarthy, retires from the floor in utter confusion after failing to force through the nomination of a Secretary of State. All's right with the world.

All's right, and yet all's not right. One feels that politics have been prettied up for this occasion, that a particularly well-oiled machine has pressed these characters into molds that look like the real thing, but are really pastel-tinted versions of them. The plot clickety-clicks along, but it deals with abstractions, labels, even stereotypes (albeit the stereotypes of our time). Perhaps "Advise and Consent" could be filmed in no other fashion; but one concludes long before the picture has run its course that Preminger's boldness is a sham, and we are left to admire the machinery, not its product. As to performances, in a long list of impressive names, young George Grizzard stands out as the power-hungry, envy-riddled Senator from Wyoming.

Any resemblance between "The Cabinet of Caligari" and the venerable classic to which it claims kinship by virtue of name is limited to the fact that both view the world through the eyes of a madman (or, in this instance, mad woman). Roger Kay's psychiatry may be sound, if primitive—he effects his cure in a record two and a half days—but for the viewer, this is more illuminating than engrossing; particularly since the world envisaged by a hapless Glynis Johns looks suspiciously like every other modern-designed, expensively appointed set ever erected at the Twentieth Century-Fox Studios.

—ARTHUR KNIGHT.

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BROADWAY POSTSCRIPT

Food for Thought

THE NOTION of a little man reluctantly turning to an ingenious criminal action in order to foil a merciless organization that is attempting to drive him out of business could make a delightful musical comedy. But, although the story of "Bravo Giovanni" has this recipe, it turns out to be disappointingly flavorless.

A. J. Russell's book, based on Howard Shaw's novel, introduces us to Giovanni, the proprietor of a small trattoria in Rome's Trastevere section. The role is played by Cesare Siepi, a handsome and self-assured opera star, who makes little effort to convince us that Giovanni is suffering any great distress because of the sudden threat to his livelihood presented by a chain restaurant that uses mass-production and price-war techniques. There is also very little in the proceedings to suggest either the charm or the temper of present-day Rome. The score is an assortment of quasi-Italian numbers and plain American popular tunes by Ronnie Graham and Milton Schafer. Robert Randolph's sets are a mixture of styles. And while Stanley Prager's direction and Carol Haney's choreography produce spasms of brief vitality, even these do not seem to come out of the atmosphere of Rome, or out of the story's real theme. The one exception to this is a kitchen scene in which we are treated to an amusingly absurd demonstration of how mass efficiency can defeat itself.

Mr. Siepi has a fine voice, but no emotional situation has been given him to justify his using it full throttle. Instead he sings mostly about food. There is supposed to be a romance between Giovanni and a beautiful young Italian peasant girl. But since the latter is played by a very American and brassy song belter named Michele Lee, the match becomes a half-hearted alliance between two singers with little in common.

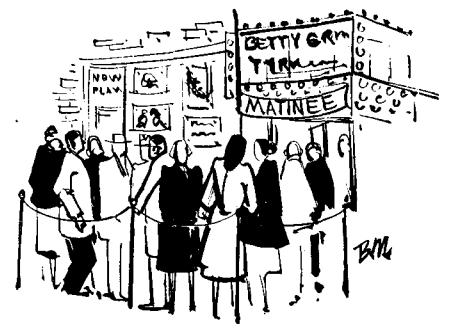
Fortunately there is one actor in the cast. David Opatoshu is modestly entertaining as the bookseller who masterminds Giovanni's underworld activities. And dancing comedienne Maria Karnilova is madly hilarious as a supposedly decrepit old lady who outdances not only her younger escort, but the entire personnel of a night club.

However, one leaves "Bravo Giovanni" both wondering what this musical might have been like if more justice had been done to its story and feeling a little depressed about the chances au-

thentic or distinctive fare has of emerging from the Broadway kitchen.

By coincidence this same week saw a stunning display of what can be accomplished by theatre artists creating under less hectic conditions. The Royal Dramatic Theatre of Sweden presented three masterful productions on successive nights and was content to offer us fine plays beautifully formed and produced—without reshaping the plays to disguise the fact that some important roles were less than ideally cast.

For instance, the company's production of "Long Day's Journey Into Night" was performed here with a less extraordinary actor playing the role originally created by Lars Hanson. The seventy-six-year-old dean of Swedish actors was offered to us in Strindberg's "The Father" instead. Mr. Hanson is a great actor who can be outrageously preposterous at one moment, and in the next shut off your impulse to laugh with the terrifying depth of his vision. After seeing him in "The Father," one gets an idea of the tension he brought



to the O'Neill play, and which was lessened here by his absence. Nevertheless, the rest of the original Tyrone family was complete, and the performances of Inga Tidblad as Mary, Jarl Kulle as Edmund, and Ulf Palme as Jim were individually splendid.

The Swedish company's visit suggests the reasons why Eugene O'Neill's three posthumously published plays had their world premières in Stockholm, and why Mrs. O'Neill has given the company the right to perform her late husband's unfinished and unpublished "More Stately Mansions" in Stockholm next fall. It is not that we do not have actors and actresses of this caliber here. We do. What we lack, and this lack becomes greater each season, are sensible conditions for theatrical creativity. —HENRY HEWES.