

IN NEW YORK'S THEATRES

5 TONY AWARDS
BEST PLAY OF THE YEAR

EMLYN WILLIAMS
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Eves at 8:30; Mats. Wed. 2:00 & Sat. 2:30

"MAGNIFICENT!"—Chapman, News
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CAMELOT
with Laurie Main
and Madeleine Sherwood
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"RICHARD RODGERS IS A MAGICIAN OF THE
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NO STRINGS
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Music and Lyrics by
RICHARD RODGERS
Book by SAMUEL TAYLOR
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DRAMA CRITICS AWARD
BEST AMERICAN PLAY OF THE YEAR
MARGARET SHELLEY
LEIGHTON WINTERS
ALAN WEBB
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by TENNESSEE WILLIAMS
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BROADWAY POSTSCRIPT

Chronicle Complaints

STRATFORD, CONN.
THERE are some pleasant inno-
vations in Connecticut Shake-
speare viewing this season. For
one thing, the newly built Stratford
Motor Inn's Mermaid Tavern manages
both to have fun with "yards of beer"
and other colorful aspects of sixteenth-
century taverns, and at the same time
to serve a superior meal. And for an-
other, the theatre's potato-chip scenery
which oppressed presentations here the
last two seasons has made its belated
disappearance.

These benefits are to be cherished,
along with the fact that this season's
first two productions avoid the ludic-
riousnesses of the previous summer,
and are handsomely costumed and set
by Motley and Eldon Elder. However,
they still fall short of achieving the sus-
tained theatrical excitement the two
directors have delivered elsewhere.

Although, "Richard II" is directed by
Allen Fletcher and "Henry IV, Part I"
by Douglas Seale, both productions
should be regarded here as a single
play, because one leads straight into
the next—allowing us to discount in-
dividual performances in favor of the
total story.

As it turns out there are several per-
formances that can do with discounting.
One is Richard Basehart's King Richard
—for while Mr. Basehart has a certain
attractive sunniness and an unstilted
delivery, he seems to lack the sensi-
tivity and sharp intellect of Richard.
Indeed when he says, "I had forgot.
Am I not king?" we find that he is far
from alone in needing this memory jog.
The notion of casting young Hal Hol-
brook as the aged John of Gaunt
doesn't really work either. Mr. Hol-
brook does have a character actor's
skill, which permits him to convince us
of Gaunt's age, but he comes across as
a barking, shrewd old man, not as an
eloquent prophet, steeped in a genuine
love of and distress for his misruled
country.

The two strongest performances in
the play are given by Philip Bosco as
Bolingbroke (later Henry IV) and
Anne Fielding as the Queen. Mr. Bosco
is imposing both visually and vocally
and unlike some of the others allows
his responses to come out of what is
going on around him. His best moment
comes when, after his patience has
been tried by a foolishly sentimental
York (played for comedy by Patrick
Hines), he demands, almost in tears:
"What would you have me do?" And

Miss Fielding displays more anger and
sorrow than does the king, her husband.
In the garden scene, thanks to her and
to Le Roi Operti, who plays the gar-
dener the queen has cursed for bringing
her bad news, the scene suddenly
catches a full awareness of the play's
ironic and poetic essence. The gar-
dener genuinely wishes that his sup-
posedly divine rulers had the power to
affect his skill.

Here and in a few other places Mr.
Fletcher's direction shines. For instance,
he begins something quite interesting
when he has Richard remove his
crown, place it on the ground in front
of him, and by referring his speech to
it make clear that he is talking not
about himself, but about the state of
kingship. And whenever he can,
Fletcher pushes the action out onto the
stage apron and shuts off the huge
opening behind with a lowered iron
grill. True, this isn't a very successful
Richard II, but perhaps it is a moder-
ately workable "Henry IV, Part 1/2."

Douglas Seale picks up the baton
swiftly to provide a "Henry IV, Part 1"
that has much beauty in its staging.
Yet it, too, suffers some miscasting.
James Ray, who showed us a steadfast
sincerity that suited the reformed
Henry V when Ray played him in
Central Park a couple of summers ago,
finds that same quality much less valu-
able in the dissolute period of Henry's
life as a prince. Hal Holbrook's Hotspur
seems a monotonously choppy and
rural jumping jack. And while Eric
Berry's Dickensian Falstaff draws the
obvious laughs, he seldom appears
much more than a selfish and not very
bright coward, who continually speaks
as if he were suffering hernia spasms.

While Mr. Bosco is again excellent as
Henry IV, the best performance in this
play is Richard Waring's Glendower.
Those of us who remember Mr. War-
ing in "The Corn Is Green," more than
twenty years ago, can rejoice that he
has found another Welsh role into
which he can release his full energy.

Mr. Seale, like Fletcher, seems to
have discovered that the action is most
effective when he shuts off the stage
opening and plays down front, and he
alternates between this and full-stage
spectacle. Perhaps the next step is to
plug up the opening permanently, and
to put actors of Mr. Bosco's and Mr.
Waring's quality into a more exciting
and dynamic relationship to each other
than they ever are for long in these
two productions. —HENRY HEWES.



Touch Not a Hair

THERE is a theory dear to many Hollywood hearts that you never tamper with a hit. "Let's not improve a success into a failure," the executives like to tell writers or directors faced with the problem of translating a hit play or a best-selling novel into something resembling a movie. And presumably the more the studio paid for the rights to these sterling properties, the more determined they are to present them to the world unaltered (apart from those sections that might cause Production Code authorities or the Legion of Decency to lift an eyebrow). The fact that such alterations might be required by the medium, they regard as irrelevant, immaterial, and a sign of downright incompetence.

It is this thinking that all too obviously dominates the new Warner Brothers's production of "The Music Man," a show that enjoyed a prolonged success on Broadway, then went on to tour the hinterland with equally happy results. With such proof of stability, with such an impressive record of performance, Warner did the inevitable. From the original cast, they took the star, Robert Preston, as well as Paul Ford. The Buffalo Bills, Peggy Mondo, and Adnia Rice. Others were recruited from the road company. And tying the package together was director Morton DaCosta, who had performed a similar service for Warner in bringing "Auntie Mame" to the screen.

The result is precisely what you might expect, an overliteral, overslavish adherence to the stage version. Marion Hargrove's screenplay follows the pattern of Meredith Willson's libretto not only scene for scene, but almost line for line. And, despite wide-screen Technirama, DaCosta tends to photograph everything in long, static shots that only serve to underscore the sense of theatre. His camera setups are in themselves often quite exciting (as in the close-up of a little girl practicing the piano: the camera is inside the piano, and the keyboard fills the screen from one side to the other); but they are also notably lacking in variety, and betray an astonishing reluctance to move the camera, even in scenes that cry out for camera movement.

This impression is reinforced rather than mitigated by the freedom the camera enjoys in the film's three big song-and-dance numbers, "Shipooopi," "Madam Librarian," and of course "Seventy-Six Trombones." As chore-

ographed by Onna White, they become the real show stoppers—imaginatively and humorously conceived (the library dance, for example, is a soft-shoe, because it's quieter), energetically and immaculately performed, and sparked with an exuberance for sheer space that occurs nowhere else in the entire picture. After each of these episodes, one is increasingly reluctant to return to the confines of the story.

But it must also be admitted that Meredith Willson's show is virtually indestructible. He has converted a cornfield into a gold mine; and the values that kept it for years the hottest ticket in town have precious little to do with technique. His fable about Harold Hill, the supsalesman who can convert kids into musicians through faith, obviously struck a responsive chord throughout the nation. Its setting (Iowa, 1912) holds a nostalgic charm—a rustic America as we would like it to have been. His characters are genuinely funny, without the bite characteristic of today's funnymen. And he has a gift for melody that, like Victor Herbert before him, states with appealing directness a romantic ballad, a clever patter song, or a rousing march.

With Robert Preston, as spry as ever, on hand again as Hill, and Shirley Jones trilling away as the perceptive but susceptible librarian, the resulting show is bound to please a great many people. But the nagging suspicion remains that a good deal more judicious tampering with a hit might have improved it into a really memorable musical.

ON THE other hand, no amount of tampering could have made "Boys Night Out" anything more than what it is—another tasteless, riotously unfunny attempt to wring humor from an unconventional (and unsavory) mating of the sexes. A quartet of bright-eyed young men, most of them married, share expenses on a furnished (with blonde) apartment. Each has his prescribed night at the apartment; but the girl—Kim Novak, in a particularly inspired bit of offbeat casting—is more interested in motivational research for a college thesis than in unmotivated sex with some hungry strangers. The late Ferenc Molnar used to be adept at this sort of thing, but apparently there are no Molnars currently in residence on the M-G-M lot.

—ARTHUR KNIGHT.

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