



BROADWAY POSTSCRIPT

An Italian Breeze

THE SECRET of the Old Vic's exciting new production of "Romeo and Juliet" is that it is playful in the best sense of the word. Its Italian director, Franco Zeffirelli, has approached the English classic without reverence or reticence. To him it is just another play in which each situation must be made credible, theatrically effective, and above all vital. As far as he is concerned, the poetry in this early Shakespeare play is "second-class," and even if it is better than he rates it, he prefers to let it take care of itself and concentrate on the action.

To help his approach he has designed a massive sun-baked Italian street to create a Verona in which danger can lurk, suddenly erupt, and quickly subside. He has peopled it with young Montagus and Capulets who are not effete courtiers but young hell-raisers. And throughout the play his concentration stays on the hot-blooded portion of the proceedings, with scant concern for any likelihood that the deaths of the lovers will stop vendettas for very long.

John Stride plays Romeo as an emotional but extremely normal young man. He is one of the gang, and we feel that had he not wooed Juliet, almost any of his cronies could have substituted for him. The most colorful member of his group is, of course, Mercutio, and Edward Atienza portrays him as a mimicking buffoon. In his hands the "Queen Mab" speech is one more opportunity to ridicule love and the words became just an excuse for a rapid series of sarcastic acrobatic poses. Even in his fatal duel with Tybalt he appears almost more concerned with showing his opponent up as an over-elegant sissy than he is in defeating him.

As Juliet, Joanna Dunham manages by sheer performing partly to surmount personal qualities that are not ideal for the role. Although she is young and pretty, Miss Dunham emanates such strength and determination that we cannot believe that she could not have organized the whole love affair more efficiently, or that she wouldn't pull herself together to live on after Romeo's death. She is at her best in the balcony scene, as indeed is Mr. Stride.

To make the scene work better than I have ever seen it do, Mr. Zeffirelli uses a simple design principle. He constructs his balcony as the inner parapet of a high wall stretching all the way across the back of the stage. This gives both actors running room so that the

scene can now be played with a great deal of movement. Juliet scampers back and forth laterally, as prompted by her emotional impulses, to give the scene a Punch-and-Judy-show quality. And, when the spirit moves him, Romeo rushes upstage and climbs the wall. Thus, instead of the usual poetic and static reciting of sentiments, we have two hot-blooded kids trying to get at each other, with all the awkwardness and embarrassment of inexperienced lovers. The result is highly entertaining and predominantly humorous.

The tragedy works somewhat less well. Again Mr. Zeffirelli casts aside reserve and there is much all-out sobbing and hasty-tempered acts, the best of which is perhaps the moment when Romeo throws Friar Lawrence's Bible on the floor as his reaction to appeasement. And the bedroom with its high-canopied bed makes a stunning set reminiscent of Christian Bérard. Yet the narrative part of the play appears to bore the actors and self-revelation seems to interest them less than action. Thus this "Romeo and Juliet" emerges as more adventure story than tragedy, but its vigor and the way its young performers plunge into it not only compensate for any loss of grandeur, but also mark Mr. Zeffirelli as a working, as opposed to a theoretical, director who may invigorate the Broadway theatre a bit next fall when he hopes to stage a "young" "Camille" here with Susan Strasberg and Paul Newman.

THE Off-Broadway revival of "The Golden Apple" at the York Theatre is a pleasant event that not only reminds us of the superior quality of Jerome Moross and the late John LaTouche, but reveals a surprising wealth of skilled young talents. These include Robert Turoff, who has staged this fanciful version of "The Odyssey" imaginatively; Bill Hargate, whose simple but stylish settings perform as much as do the actors; Roberta MacDonald as a "Hail-Helen-well-met" who can tumble down the notes of "Lazy Afternoon" making all the stops in what is perhaps the most lushly seductive musical comedy song ever written; Swen Swenson, who again thrives as the spirit of illicit pleasures, and Jane Connell, whose individual brand of humor gives a much-needed spontaneity to an admirable and ingenious work that, because it is all sung in formal couplets, can occasionally seem studied.

—HENRY HEWES.

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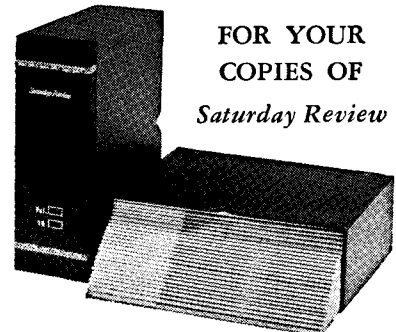
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TV AND RADIO

The Return of Howard K. Smith

THE TITLES of regularly scheduled network news and public affairs programs are usually vague and rarely significant. "News and Comment," the name of the new Howard K. Smith half-hour series (Wednesday evenings, ABC-TV), is an exception. This title is meant to indicate clearly what the former CBS journalist is attempting to do—both report the news and comment on it. Mr. Smith, as is generally known, resigned from CBS some months ago as a result of differences with that network's management over the subtleties of "commenting," "reporting," "analyzing," "interpreting," etc. [SR, Nov. 18]. He was hired shortly thereafter by James C. Hagerty, ABC's vice president in charge of news and public affairs. When Mr. Hagerty testified at the recent FCC network hearings in Washington, a commissioner asked him why the newscaster could do at ABC what he was obviously not permitted to do at CBS. Mr. Hagerty replied that he couldn't speak for any

other network but he was sure that he and Howard K. Smith would have no trouble getting along.

On his first ABC program the newscaster chose to "comment" on the biggest news story of our time—the Cold War. The broadcast was not representative of what Mr. Smith is likely to attempt every week. He wanted first to "lay a foundation" for future reports and commentaries in which he would deal with events of the week. His analysis of why the Russians seem to have the better of us in the continuing game of antagonistic peace—despite the fact that our power potential is greater—was lucid, though put in general terms. One could not quarrel with his suggestion that this nation needs to learn new attitudes which can yield the right mix of softness and toughness in dealing with the Soviet Union. Nor could many take exception to Mr. Smith's stress on the importance of education as an ultimate weapon in the Cold War. His generalized approach could not avoid

oversimplification, but this price was inevitable for so broad a subject in so brief an essay. We hope that in future programs, dealing with specific events, the TV journalist can suggest details of "the right mix," can be somewhat more specific.

Mr. Smith seemed to be urging a tougher challenge in the academic disciplines for all children. He interviewed Arthur Trace, author of "What Ivan Knows that Johnny Doesn't." Russian children are ahead of ours, the author said, in vocabulary, history, languages. Perhaps so—but many educators would ask what are the implications, for a democratic society, of rigorous standards which give short shrift to individual differences in learners. Still, if this be editorializing one wonders what CBS was so afraid of. Viewers may differ with Mr. Smith's "comments" but he is responsible, forthright, and informed.

UNTIL Howard K. Smith hits his stride and reveals the true degree of incisiveness in his comments, the chief interest in his new show is his attempt ("an experiment in TV journalism") to do a "commentary on the news" as opposed to a documentary. He recalled in a preface, "the golden age of radio," when Americans could tune in, at the dinner hour, half a dozen well-informed commentaries on the news. They helped, Mr. Smith said, in the nation's transition from isolation to acceptance of our leadership in world affairs. The "experiment" will be viewed with interest in the profession. First, Smith is obviously going for the story line carried by ideas and not by pictures (the current fashion). His initial show was what the trade would call an "illustrated lecture." Nevertheless, it held attention, and the half-hour was not slow. Second, the question is: Can one man keep it up, week after week, maneuvering a good idea successfully past the monstrous apparatus and the legion of its technical specialists? If he can, he will make a giant contribution to television's great need for telling us not only *that* a thing is but also *what* it is.

Third, who will be there watching if he does? Voices from Europe were a novelty when Kaltenborn, Swing, Murrow, et al., covered the rising war beat in the 1930s. There was national consensus—we were intensely and personally involved. Today there's still consensus and involvement, but where is the personal intensity? Largely, Mr. Smith will be carrying information to the informed. The bigger crowds—the ones who really need it—will be elsewhere at the escape dials. This is news, too—crying for commentary.

—ROBERT LEWIS SHAYON.



If you love children, your heart will go out to Tommy Littleraven, a 9-year-old American Indian boy who is attending school off the reservation for the first time. Going to school in town frightens Tommy. He is afraid that his non-Indian schoolmates are laughing at his tattered clothing, at his faulty English.

He yearns to join the school club, buy personal books, clothing, go out for a soda with the other boys. But his parents are too poor to give him pocket money. And so Tommy wanders off by himself and dreams that someday he will have the money to do what his non-Indian schoolmates do.

if you love children

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