



## Lost Opportunity in India

NEW DELHI.

THE United States has just lost another battle in the cold war, with strategic India the scene of the encounter. Tragically, it was a loss by default. The third Indian International Film Festival, recently concluded, afforded entrants an access to the general public without parallel at similar events throughout the world. Some eighty in-competition and noncompetitive entries were shown at three-times-a-day screenings in six large halls throughout New Delhi, and most of them drew full houses. Most pictures were shown at least six times during the two weeks of the festival, a few even more often. But not the American ones. The representatives of the American companies in Bombay made it clear to the festival authorities that anything beyond a single day would be an infringement upon their commercial interests. The United States showed fewer films, and showed them less often, than any other major country.

Not only that; the American selections seemed singularly inappropriate to the occasion. The official entry, a last-minute substitution, was *Shadow of the Sea*, a fantasy independently produced by a documentary film-maker in Brazil. (Our original choice, Robert Radnitz's *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, was even less appropriate: The festival screening committee rejected it, not on grounds of quality, but because they felt its message and its characters so alien to the Indians that it would not be understood.) Out of competition were *America, America*, filmed mainly in Greece; the off-beat *Hallelujah the Hills*, a product of New York's "underground cinema"; and a short on Quebec. Of the face of America today—our problems, our attitudes, the way we live—there was not a trace. Nor was there any trace of the kind of lavish, glamour-filled, star-spangled movie for which Hollywood is justly famous, and which this glamour-starved festival would have adored. Without question, a picture like *My Fair Lady* could have walked off with every major award except the documentary. As it is, we left the festival without a single prize.

But awards are perhaps least important in an affair of this kind, and at this place. As a condition to granting the festival competitive status, for the first time placing it on a par with those at Cannes, Venice, Berlin, and Moscow, the International Federation of Film Producers insisted that all entries be screened free of India's rigorous censorship restrictions. Never before could

the average Indian see a picture as its makers intended it to be, intact in its political, moral, or sociological statement. The immediate response was so overwhelming that the festival had scarcely begun before there was a flourishing black market in tickets. But did we press this advantage by running films like *Dr. Strangelove*, *Night of the Iguana*, or *One Potato, Two Potatoes*? Did we seize this opportunity to introduce to a large and relatively enlightened segment of the Indian people such excellent examples of our official propaganda as *The March* and *Nine from Little Rock*?

NEEDLESS to say, the Iron Curtain countries were far less reticent. Few of their pictures were masterpieces, but they ranged from historic epics like *Tudor* (Rumania) to Andrzej Wajda's acute commentary on contemporary youth, *Innocent Sorcerers* (Poland), and from bitter rehearsals of World War II like *Death Called Engelchen* (Czechoslovakia) to an eloquent and cinematic adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (USSR). In addition to their films, however, these countries sent delegations that were fully equipped for every contingency—critics and historians for the conferences and symposia that figured importantly in the festival's planning, hard-eyed commercial people to negotiate deals and trade agreements, intelligent writers and directors to meet the press, and a few actresses to appease the photographers, who at times outdid Italy's famed *paparazzi*. By contrast, our own delegation of six (including an attractive young teacher of film appreciation in the high schools who just happened to be in New Delhi at the time) seemed woefully inadequate, being neither briefed nor supported by its State Department.

Actually, for reasons known best to itself, the State Department had decided to go easy on the entire affair. It brought no pressure on the film companies to send either top pictures or key personalities. It threw no official reception or cocktail party, nor did members of our embassy turn up at the many affairs offered by the other competing countries. Ironically, the festival attracted precisely that segment of the Indian public that our United States Information Agency spends hundreds of thousands of dollars annually to reach—the educated, world-conscious, well-to-do upper middle class. For this purpose, USIA puts out a costly, quality monthly magazine,

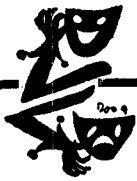
*Span*, with a giveaway circulation of 90,000. An issue devoted exclusively to the American film is currently in the works. And each Agency office has its own small projection room—fewer than 100 seats—to show these same people our documentaries. But the festival provided daily over 3,000 seats for each picture during its two weeks at New Delhi, with the possibility of additional exposure for outstanding films in festival follow-ups at Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay.

There is a further irony in a call that I received from a USIA official to ask if I thought that the festival had been rigged in favor of the Russians. My negative reply was thoroughly borne out by the awarding of the prizes. First prize went to a sensitive, if overlong, feature from Ceylon, *Gampelaliya*; the best-acting award was shared by the Russian hero of *A Tale of the Don* and the five leading ladies in the Bengali film, *Nirjan Saikatey*. As Richard Attenborough observed at the closing ceremonies, "Nowhere else have I seen such an atmosphere in the awards, so completely devoid of lobbying, bias, and prejudice." He might well have added that rarely has so distinguished a jury been called upon to judge such a thoroughly undistinguished group of pictures.

But film quality to one side, the Russians seized an opportunity that was equally available to us, and exploited to the full. They know well the value of motion pictures as a propaganda weapon, and one that is particularly effective when used outside of any apparent propagandistic context. They know well the value of film personalities as a means of reaching and influencing vast numbers of people. (At the first Indian Film Festival, in 1952, the Russian delegation—twenty-five to our two—made it a point to fly out a day or so in advance of the main party to hold "cultural" meetings in which the workers of the Soviet Union greeted the workers of India.) We, on the other hand, are still content to look on movies as simply an item of trade. The Indian market at the moment is not crucial to our film companies because, in an effort to conserve precious dollars. The Indian government has blocked remittances; the money that a picture earns in India must remain there for at least seven years.

On the other hand, India is crucial to the United States as a kind of half-way house between East and West. The reception accorded the American delegates by the Indian people at the festival left no doubt as to the warmth and friendship they feel toward us. Unfortunately, our films this time did little to justify that warmth—and provided nothing with which to buttress that friendship.

—ARTHUR KNIGHT.



## The Theater That Made Milwaukee Famous

MILWAUKEE.

THE recent announcement that Herbert Blau and Jules Irving, founders and co-directors of San Francisco's Actor's Workshop, will assume the leadership of Lincoln Center's Repertory Theater is the most dramatic development to date in the emerging resident company movement. However, it is only one of a number of signs that these companies are developing high artistic standards while tackling more substantial dramatic material than is Broadway.

For instance, New York's currently successful *Tartuffe* is a sequel to the American premiere of the version that was given here at Milwaukee's Repertory Theater last season, just as the off-Broadway hit *Six Characters in Search of an Author* was a transportation of virtually the same cast and the same director that had first produced it in Milwaukee the season before.

This season's most popular production, *Uncle Vanya*, attests the continuing vitality and excellence of this company. Staged in its intimate 350-seat arena (surrounded on all four sides by the audience), it makes no attempt to imitate other productions. For its director, Adrian Hall, has encouraged his actors to perform Robert W. Corrigan's new translation of the Chekhov play with the utmost sense of urgency, the result being that the action is fast-moving and that each character's concerns bear maximum resemblance to situations in American life.

For instance, Philip Minor's Vanya emerges as any man who has the ability to make a better career than the self-effacing one he has permitted circumstances to push him into. Thus his hysterical outburst, which Mr. Minor performs at full throttle but without self-pity, is not the absurd complaint of an inept, melancholy man, but his legitimate anger against himself for having deludedly wasted his chances in a world where timely opportunism pays off. Indeed, almost every character seems to be a victim of bad timing and misplaced talent. Peter D. MacLean's handsome Dr. Astrov comes across as a sophisticated, slightly vain, impatient man with only a mediocre talent for medicine, but with a superb creativity which he exercises in his forest conservation hobby. Furthermore his self-knowledge, which inures him to his unsatisfactory life, also toughens him against falling deeply in love. Gail Rice, as Sonya, presents an uncloying demon-

stration of the irony that to love too much is less effective than to love too little. And Janis Young as the lusty young wife living in frustration with the old and self-centered professor offers us the exasperating spectacle of a woman who married too young.

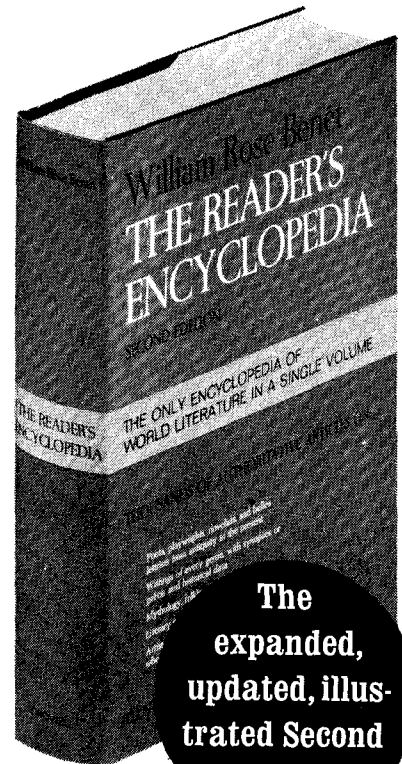
If this *Uncle Vanya* loses something in Russian flavor, richness of mood, and Chekhovian silences, it gains in immediacy and is an original conception that makes it possible to compare it with the best productions of this play. The off-Broadway one was funnier, and the British National Theater presentation last season caught more of the grotesquery of city visitors coming and upsetting the lives of some country people and blithely leaving unaware of what they had done. But this *Uncle Vanya* is beautifully acted and expresses, more fully than the aforementioned ones, these people's justifiable anger at the cruel misfortune fate has visited upon them.

A glimpse of a rehearsal of the Milwaukee Repertory Theater's *The Tempest*, directed by Stephen Porter, fresh from his triumph with the *Man and Superman* (currently delighting audiences at New York's Phoenix Theater), reveals a similar level of intelligence and stress on direct action. One can readily understand how this company has won the confidence of the community and the support of a board determined that Milwaukee should have a resident theater company offering skilled productions of important plays. The company's youthful producer, Jack McQuiggan, and its general manager, Charles R. McCallum, appear to have found a working formula, made possible by a Rockefeller Foundation Grant, in which the long-range advantages of working together can be maintained by creating a pool of directors and actors who can leave and return as particular plays demand. This means better cast and better-directed productions with performers and directors who have found a compatibility with this theater.

Milwaukee is building a 550-seat theater with an open stage (surrounded on three sides by the audience) in its Center for the Performing Arts. It is scheduled to be finished by the fall of 1967 and is being paid for with three-year pledged donations from local citizens. The irony is that these pledges have exhausted funds that might otherwise have supported the company that is counted on to occupy with distinction the completed edifice.

—HENRY HEWES.

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