



Theater Around the U.S.

AS A MATTER of policy, once in its annual seven-play season Washington D.C.'s Arena Stage accepts the financial hazards that attend the unveiling of a completely new work. And while none has gone on to become a Broadway hit, each has added character and purpose to the Arena Stage operation.

This season's venture is a first play by Loring Mandel, who adapted *Advise and Consent* for Broadway. Titled *Project Immortality* it poses a fascinating question. Could the Defense Department preserve the problem-solving genius of a dying scientist by feeding his way of thinking into a computer system? And if so, would this constitute a greater immortality than the scientist might achieve through books, teaching, and human relationships?

The play begins with Martin, a young Defense Department mathematician, invading the scientist's house, and persuading him begrudgingly to give the project some of his precious time. As Martin is exposed to the private life of his subject, we see him change from cerebral instrument to human being. And the sense of a whole household is beautifully evoked by Edwin Sherin's in-the-round staging which permits many actions to occur simultaneously. Thus is emphasized Mr. Mandel's point that one man's personality cannot be plucked out of its context, and that the irrational messes of living are just as important as our rational achievements.

On the other hand the amorphousness of the production and the author's inability or unwillingness to penetrate his situations more profoundly than we do in real life causes the play to fall considerably short of achieving its promise. That promise seems highest in those scenes where actor Dana Elcar has the opportunity to display great intellectual toughness and sarcastic humor. There is a breathtaking scene in which by means of mathematical equations projected against a screen he solves a complicated problem for a group of stumped Brookhaven scientists. And the play's final touch of having the scientist's wife let us know her music-loving husband has died simply by turning up the volume on the hi-fi, is magnificent in its scorn for death's dominion.

Where the proceedings become less thrilling are in the playwright's attempt to deal with domestic issues naturalistically. Here we descend into an ordinariness that compares unfavorably with the greater theatricality of the leading character's caustic responses to conven-

tional attitudes. Nevertheless these situations do relate to our own lives so that our attention is still held. And whatever our disappointment, we cannot think of a single new American play of the current Broadway season which is as contemporary in its subject matter, as challenging in its concept, or as provocative in its content.

Under the knowing leadership of John Reich, Chicago's Goodman Theatre has built a reputation for tackling old plays freshly and offering American premieres of modern works from other languages. Last season, for instance, it had a great success with a version of *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe* in which the narrator and one of the characters were merged into one role. And this year it is pleasing its popular audiences with the first English-language production of Eugene Ionesco's *The Pedestrian in the Air*. (See SR June 8, 1963.)

While the latter is less a play than a fitful series of charades, it does disarm its audiences by its comic excursions, its trick scenery, and its flying actors. But, as usual, Ionesco jokes most when he is most serious. Thus he puts into the mouth of his leading character, Berenger, his own despair at the problem of writing anything worth the effort, and at his view of the violently horrible world inside which we construct our tepid make-believe one. The production here is freshly conceived by director Joseph Slowik and features a superb performance by Alvin Epstein as Berenger. Not only does Mr. Epstein make delightful the discovery that he can fly by exercise of will, but, more important, he captures the author's sense of seeing the world freshly, and his tragic forlornness at his lonely vulnerability in it.

On the campus of the University of Indiana what may be a workable formula for the creating of state-supported theater is being tested. The distinguished head of the university's theater department, Richard Moody, has launched a professional company to perform here and to visit other colleges throughout the state. The box-office prices are kept low (a \$2 top) and the required subsidy to provide annual fellowships for the actors comes from within the university and thus indirectly from the state. Its current revival of Sheridan's *The Rivals* compares very favorably with the National Repertory Theatre production of the same play, now touring American cities, and is evidence that a popular state theater can be developed in this manner.

—HENRY HEWES.

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As Others See Us



OTTAWA:

Geography and Friendship

THE OBSERVATION that Canada's foremost international preoccupation must inevitably be its relations with the United States is both trite and accurate. So it proved in 1965. The Rhodesian crisis was the only important issue in which this relationship was not involved. Policy on all other questions could only be formulated after careful consideration of its potential effect in Washington. . . .

The Canadian government may have had reservations about United States policy in Vietnam and Santo Domingo, but if so, they were relatively muted. In a speech in Philadelphia early in the year, Prime Minister Pearson suggested a pause in the bombing of North Vietnam targets. His public intervention was reported to have annoyed President Johnson, though this has never been officially confirmed. At any rate, if Mr. Pearson subsequently expressed any doubts about U.S. policy, it was in private rather than from a public platform. Reading between the lines, one could sense a distinct unease over the U.S. in-

tervention in Santo Domingo, but there were no outright criticisms. . . .

Certainly this year has emphasized the words of the late President Kennedy when he spoke to Parliament in May 1961: "Geography has made us neighbors. History has made us friends. Economics has made us partners. And necessity has made us allies."

—Ottawa Citizen.

TORONTO:

The Pursuit of Peace

THE PATIENT PURSUIT of peace in Southeast Asia—initiated by the United States—has been punctuated by the sound of war gongs struck by the Communist leaders in Hanoi and Peking. In both capitals, the peace overtures carried to the principal capitals of the world by America's envoys have apparently been rejected in advance by the men who would rule the destinies of Asia's millions and carry their brand of revolutionary Communism beyond the limits of that continent.

Nevertheless, the pursuit goes on, quietly, patiently, and thoughtfully. It is

apparent that, while there remains the slightest chance of bringing the Vietnam crisis to the conference table, Washington and its allies will use every corridor that gives promise of leading to that goal. The course is tortuous. It is hazardous. But President Johnson is clearly determined that, if the war in Vietnam should increase in intensity and scope, it will not be because of any lack of vigor on the part of his government. . . .

—The Telegram.

LONDON:

Home Every Night

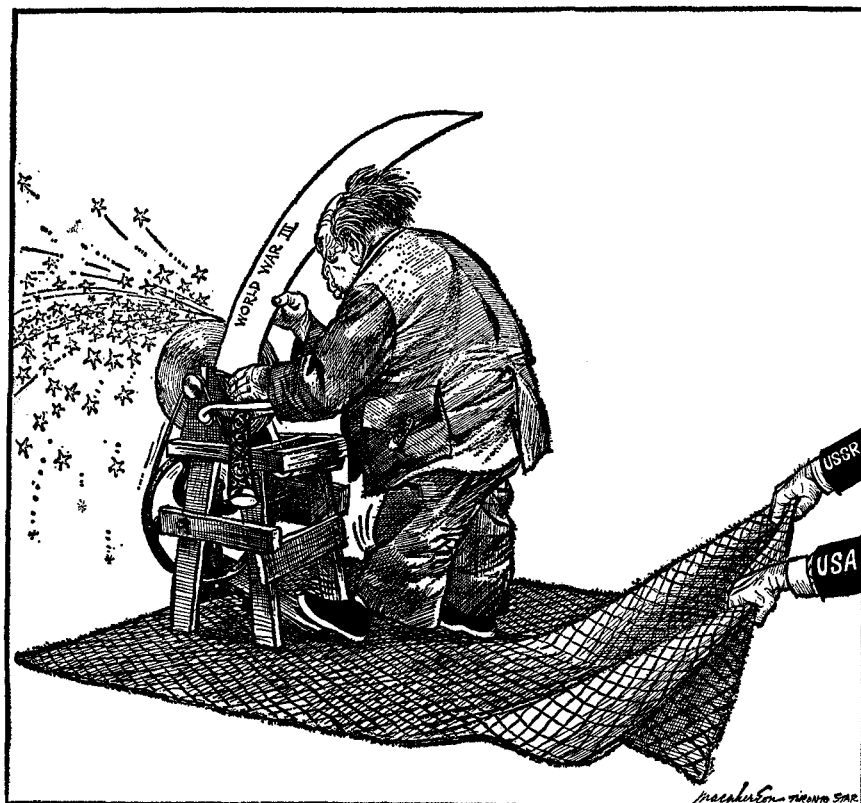
THE PRIVATE REPORT on the Vietnam war submitted by Senator Mansfield to President Johnson makes even gloomier reading, I believe, than the more public version. Despite the enormous increase in U.S. forces during the last year, no military progress has been made, and the Vietnamese have been further alienated by the destruction of villages and heavy civilian casualties. In the light of this it's odd that *Time* should select General Westmoreland—who carries the responsibility for the conduct of operations—as the Man of the Year. He seems to me to be the Douglas Haig of the Vietnam war. Where Haig had a blind obsession with frontal assaults, Westmoreland cherishes a similar belief in the supremacy of hardware. The British have learned in Malaya and Borneo that what matters in guerrilla warfare are *people*. Our troops are trained to live in the jungle for up to nine months at a time, to become a part of the environment and so meet the guerrillas on equal terms; they also know that the lives of the villagers are sacred, because it is only by gaining their allegiance that the war can be won. What of the Americans? I quote a *Herald Tribune* headline: 'Scorched Earth Policy—GIs Raze Homes, Crops, Where Reds Are Aided.' They go to war by helicopter in the morning and return to their comfortable billets at night. It's not so very different from the Earl of Cardigan, commander of the Light Brigade, who, on the evening of Balaclava, returned to his yacht for a champagne supper.

—Paul Johnson in the *New Statesman*.

ADELAIDE:

No More Troops

AMERICA SOON is to lift her force in South Vietnam to a possible 400,000 men. Canberra has again said there has been no request for more Australian troops, but the pattern is clear. We will be asked to increase our contribution, and the Australian government carries a heavy responsibility in its reply. . . .



A Canadian view of the new international teamwork.