



Artificial Resuscitation

AT FIRST GLANCE it would seem that George S. Kaufman's and Edna Ferber's 1932 comedy, *Dinner at Eight*, could be as successfully revived as was *You Can't Take It With You* last season. Both of these plays capture the flavor of periods we recall with some nostalgia, and both gently satirize the foibles of typical characters. Unfortunately, Sir Tyrone Guthrie's production of *Dinner at Eight* emerges as far less genuinely entertaining, a spotty series of vignettes sprinkled with ineffectual attempts at humor.

One suspects that Guthrie may have underestimated the difficulty of mixing the play's small number of easily satirized types with so many more who are not. Nor does the director appear to have resolved the problem presented by the plethora of plot details that have lost their dramatic vigor through use and reuse in so many B-movies. Not that these clichés are untrue. Well-bred young ladies still prefer philandering glamour boys to honorably intentioned young conservatives. Wives still stick to decent husbands whom they know to be occasionally unfaithful. And gentlemanly businessmen are still easy prey to dog-eat-dog operators. But this truthfulness in the script makes things more rather than less sticky. For one cannot quite spoof the plot, nor can one present it straightforwardly as if the modern audience could look at it with 1932 eyes.

Of the performers, only one seems to have found a suitable style. As a social matron completely engrossed in the ridiculous task of achieving a successful dinner party, June Havoc is superb. She squeaks, she flutters, she has hysterics, and is completely oblivious of the desperate crises through which she cuts her way to the most superficial objective.

Some of the others, such as Arlene Francis, Ruth Ford, Mindy Carson, and Jeffrey Lynn, seem wasted in skimpy roles. And others appear to be working in isolation at a kind of portrayal that doesn't fit into any discernible entity. Walter Pidgeon is natural and affable as a patient husband. Robert Burr is exaggeratedly grotesque as an unscrupulous tycoon. Pamela Tiffin puts on a tinselly cheapness as a sexpot wife. And Darren McGavin creates a bold, bravura portrait of an alcoholic silent-film star on the skids.

More effective, perhaps, are some of the lesser characters who can shine briefly without worrying about sustaining a style. Thus Phil Leeds, Blanche Yurka,

Judith Barcroft, April Shawhan, Lucille Patton, and Daniel Keyes manage to be mildly memorable.

David Hays's economical settings suggest the period, as do Ray Diffen's slightly satirical costumes. But despite Guthrie's good intentions, Miss Havoc's blessed arpeggios, and a few nice inside jokes about show business, *Dinner at Eight* is all at sixes and sevens.

STRANGELY enough, *Help Stamp Out Marriage!* seems to be a revival, though in fact it is not. For this new British farce uses a dated and shallow approach to play with, but not really penetrate, the modern phenomenon of casual adultery, British style.

Under George Abbott's direction, it extracts plenty of quick laughs from a situation in which a husband discovers that his wife has been putting him through a dreary diet of art films for three months so that her girl friend can deceive a married man, who visits her there every Friday night, into believing that she is a married woman. A few more laughs come out of the wife's discovery

that her husband is carrying on with a teen-age girl who works as a petrol-pump attendant. An elevator in which various combinations of bedmates just miss bumping into others who use the stairs adds to the gaiety.

Nevertheless, the game grows tiresome and the participants unsympathetic. Possibly this is because playwrights Keith Waterhouse and Willis Hall have, from the start, accepted a patently artificial tone that does not permit them to find an inner rationale beyond sexual gratification for their characters.

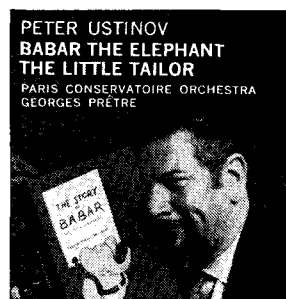
This commitment to artificiality is unfortunate, because on several occasions the new farce stumbles across ironies that could have been profitably pursued. For instance, the "other man" feels obliged to refuse a drink because he only felt justified in drinking his host's Scotch when he had been under the impression that he was committing adultery with his wife. And most significant of all is the wife's fulfilment of a "castration wish" by cutting off the sleeves of her husband's suits, with the gleeful observation, "There's something about infidelity. It puts a complete end to this farce of 'give-and-take' in marriage."

Much as these moments entertain, they also serve to remind us of the play's contrasting triviality of concern, which helps stamp out our interest every time it's lit.

—HENRY HEWES.

Peter Ustinov, Former child, narrates three musical fairy Tales.

If you wait until Christmas, these
albums may be pretty hard to find.



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Reflections in the East

IN ALL THE TIME I lived in the East I inhabited one brick ledge or another in Manhattan, a nest from which, like some hectoring bird, I would swoop off on mornings to forage for a living. In the night I would return, battered and missing a few feathers, but bearing the twigs and worms that were necessary for shelter and nutrition.

Several years have passed now since I was resident of the East, but were I to return—the young robins needing air space in which to flutter—it would have to be to the neighboring *faubourgs*. From a distance the idea of being consigned to a suburb made me sad in a way, for the footsteps of my youth were left all over the city—on the side streets, where I played punch-ball and roller-skate hockey, and in Central Park, where I skinned knees on rocks, sailed boats on the lake, and, hard as it may be to believe, learned to ski.

It is a different city now, a dozen voices warned me. Different from the city of our youth, different even from the one I yearned for when I went to war, different from the one in which I launched a career, got married, and bred children. I reminded myself that I really hadn't liked it at all when I decided to move away, now more than three years ago.

It would not be right to say, snug as we are many miles away, that the remembered lights and the remembered friends do not call. They do, urgently and frequently. Being practiced house-renters, we decided to migrate East this summer, like seasonal birds, and set up light housekeeping for a time in Westport. It is a Connecticut roost near enough to launch frequent excursions into what Mayor Lindsay was assuring me, albeit from afar, is now a Fun City, and far enough to give the sprites grass on which to gambol.

By all counts it was late in the season by the time we decided that the migratory period had arrived, and the pickings were lean. The real-estate agent with whom I dealt from 2,500 miles out assured me he had just the place. The rent was astronomical, as we all agreed, but the owners were so rich they didn't need the money, and it was all, well, an accommodation he and they were willing to make. "It has everything," he said. "Including a washing machine?" I asked at the specific request of the lady of my *ménage*. "You know, that's the one thing it doesn't have," he said without pity.

It had everything, all right, as I dis-

covered the night we arrived with baggage, tired children, and three bags of perishable groceries. It had an icebox that wasn't working, a stove that leaked grease on the floor when you put anything in the oven, drains that didn't drain, a garden full of ragweed, and holes in the screens through which the mosquitos flew with the greatest of ease. It had, as I discovered on the morrow, a beautiful expanse of lawn on which the grass hadn't been cut since the crocuses gave way to the daffodils. It had its own beach, just as the man said, complete with old Clorox bottles and empty beer cans, but it couldn't be used anyway since there had been a shark scare the day before.

There were some things it didn't have. Sufficient pots and pans to cook a meal, for one thing. A bowl for mixing, a serving spoon or fork, a knife that would slice a lettuce leaf, and an implement with which to wash a dish were not in its inventory. There were calls to the real estate man and calls from him to me, but he had sustained a painful injury to his back, poor man, and was in no position to act as go-between with the owners. When we stayed too long on the phone his wife cut in on the extension to berate me for not showing more empathy for her husband.

IT went like this for four days, at a rate that was running \$50 a day, and on the fifth day the icebox got fixed, a new stove was wheeled in, pots and bowls and pans arrived, and the shark presumably left. An allowance was made on the initial assessment, and after a certain amity had been reached, the husband of the owner of the house, a man long since retired, drove over in his Jaguar to collect the balance.

My Westport house was a derelict house in its way. It was occasionally lent to actors, but it was unloved in by a family and uncared for by its owner. House and villa renting, both summer and winter, are becoming ever more popular. Companies that arrange house exchanges, and others that arrange rentals abroad, do an active business. Still, I think there are standard rules to follow: 1) Don't rent a house that is not normally occupied by a family—otherwise it is likely to be unkempt and ill-equipped; 2) never rent a house that has not been inspected by someone you trust and who knows your taste.

In the last ten years of flea-hopping I have rented in Southampton, Cape Cod,

Nassau, Puerto Rico, and four times in Hawaii. To me there is no better way of crawling inside a community, of learning the local life, foraging in the markets, trying the cuisine, inhaling the color—all the things from which one is insulated in a hotel. One should be prepared to sacrifice certain hotel amenities guaranteed by good management—good service, adequate and cheerful help, and a practiced chef in the kitchen. What's more you don't have to wash the dishes.

With the house finally put in workable order, I set out to learn about life in the suburbs. We were in the Clam Box for the steamers and a breath of the sea; in Gold's for the whitefish and the bagels and a breath of New York. In the fish department of the supermarket I bought a giant salmon and steamed it in the roasting pan—who expected the house to come with a fish poacher?—and we served it cold the next day to friends who came up from the city. On Saturday nights we reserved the Sunday *Times* at the drugstore, the way good suburban people do, and came over to collect it on Sunday mornings. We took long Sunday rides north along the Gold Coast, as they call it in Westport, past the big estates that spread along Long Island Sound like Mississippi plantation houses, rolled onward to Fairfield, and got lost threading through the lovely leafy back roads on the way back.

There were days when we stumbled on the Bridge Lobster House which occupies a ramshackle shingle house by the water's very edge. Weekend boatmen were readying their craft for a summer day's outing, and we were so entranced with the life at the shore that we bought a mess of clams and lobsters, took them home, and stuffed them into every available pot to steam. They were gorgeous, and we decided to give a party the next week. There are people who live along Long Island Sound who will stage a clambake at your home, and I set about ferreting them out. Reservations have to be made weeks ahead, I found, even though the price per invitee can run to \$9.50. Many caterers, moreover, at least in these yeasty climes, won't talk to you unless you have invited a minimum of seventy-five people.

But one clambaker led to another, and ultimately I found a printer who organized clambakes on Saturdays. He needed only a guarantee of twenty eaters and his price was considerably less than that of the heralded caterers. He came early on Saturday morning with great vats which he soon had boiling. By the time the guests came from the city the table had been laid under the birches and the great shade trees, and everyone sat down to mounds of steamers to be followed by lobsters, corn, giant clams that came in gauze bags, and, eventually, (Continued on page 67)