

SR Goes to the Movies

Arthur Knight

Little Ones

A CURIOUS FACT of life in Hollywood is that pictures costing \$500,000 or less are considered the chancey ones, while those with budgets soaring to astronomical sums are regarded as relatively safe. The reasoning behind this odd approach to investment lies in the mathematics of distribution. Today, a film must earn back about three times its negative cost before it begins to show a profit. A movie budgeted at \$500,000, in other words, would have to take in something like \$1,500,000 just to break even, and despite today's higher admission prices, that still means an awful lot of tickets. Furthermore, no producer working on an under-\$500,000 budget can possibly afford a star name, supposedly the "guarantee" of an audience turnout. And finally, since advertising and publicity are geared directly to budget, the chances are slim that even a first-rate low-cost production will receive a fraction of the attention it deserves. The exploitation money is showered instead on the "blockbusters" as further "guarantee" of a hefty return on those multi-million-dollar investments.

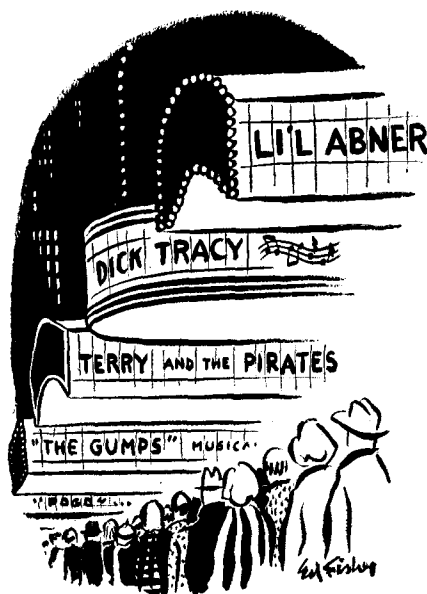
Although the contradictions in this system are woefully apparent, and most producers of low-budget pictures understand going in that the cards are stacked against them, nevertheless the neophytes stand ready to bet against the house. It is, after all, their only chance to get to where the big money is. A case in point: *The First Time*, which

just happens to be the first time out for its producers, former actor Roger Smith and his youthful associate, Allan Carr. Working under the umbrella of the Mirisch Productions, Inc., they went through hell to get their picture on the screen. Leslie Caron had originally been signed for the leading role, then began to demand script changes as befitting her status as star. Lovely Jacqueline Bisset was substituted. After about two weeks of shooting, the young producers realized that they had made a mistake in their choice of director. James Neilson, a fugitive from the Disney ménage, was brought in as a replacement. (One can literally see where the transition occurred.) And when the film, originally titled *The Beginners*, was ready for release, someone had the bright idea of calling it *You Don't Need Pajamas at Rosie's*. Lacking a real star, they figured, you need something to get them in at the box office.

Happily, calmer minds prevailed. The producers were able to convince their studio that anyone attracted by the *Pajamas* title would hate their film and, conversely, that the people who would like their picture might be repelled by its nomenclature. A *Rosie* by any other name, they argued, would smell sweeter. And they were right. While *The First Time* is not the greatest title in the world, one only hopes that it will not join Rex Reed's distressing list of movies that went down the drain because their studios lacked confidence in them or had failed to invest enough money in them. Essentially, it is a joyous, sensitive, and wholly unprurient account of a trio of teenagers who pick up a girl that they, in their innocence, believe to be a prostitute. The boys out on the town for the first time—Wes Stern, Wink Roberts, and Rick Kelman—are marvelously restrained and natural. (Their lines help, too.) And since the town that they are out on happens to be Niagara Falls, there is also considerable visual beauty to enjoy—that is, if you can keep your eyes off Jacqueline Bisset who, as the presumed prostitute, romps through her role with a zest and deftness that her earlier bit parts merely hinted at. Miss Bisset is clearly destined for greater things; the studios might well consider using their low-budget films of today to develop their stars of tomorrow.

Another approach altogether is the one employed by Hall Bartlett, the producer, director, and co-author with Bill

E. Kelly of *Changes*, a film that seriously attempts to get beneath the skin of the "now" generation. Mr. Bartlett (who turned out one of my favorite films, *Navajo*, in 1952) financed *Changes* completely on his own—a rare procedure in Hollywood—because he believed in what he was doing, and because he wanted to make his picture his own way. He wanted to do his own thing. Admirable as the attempt may be, Hall Bartlett, born in 1922, is not "now"; while his picture exudes a warmth and feeling for the youth of today seeking to find and understand themselves, it is the work of a somewhat square, sympathetic outsider who wants in, as opposed to, for example, today's student films that transmit the same message from the inside. But there is an honesty here in Bartlett's purpose, a lyric beauty in Richard Moore's photography, and a certain daring in introducing such totally engaging non-stars as Kent Lane, Michele Carey, and Manuella Thies in the central roles. Significantly, this "little" film is being distributed by Cinema, originally the biggest of the big screen processes.



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World of Dance

Walter Terry

Viva Amalia y Mexico!

NEW YORK EXISTS, in the last days of winter and just before spring tries to give a brush of beauty to an almost hopelessly littered city, on the cliché its skyline, and not on its dismal corners. Even the hippies and the student protesters seem to strive for unattractiveness, and they lose out on public sympathy because they settle for an unwashed ugliness instead of learning how to stage their act. Mexico, which has had its student problems, has a marvelous batch of bright youngsters who know how to stage an act. They constitute the Ballet Folklorico of Mexico, and they are beautiful. They are also young, vital, even explosive, and in their one-week stand at the City Center in late March, they gave drab, dirty Manhattan a shining prelude to spring.

This year's touring program is much better than the one last seen in America. It is, perhaps, a trifle more "folk" than "lorico," and this gives a better balance between the lively, romantic, rural dances of the contemporary Mexican of mixed Spanish and Indian heritage and the ceremonies of the pre-Columbian inhabitants. This is by no means intended to underestimate the scenic marvels, the impressive rites that Amalia Hernandez, founder-director of the troupe, has recaptured from a glittering past. It simply means that the joyous welcoming spirit of the dazzlingly dressed Zapotecs in *Guelaguetza* and the life-size

Mexican Toys in all their antic gaiety are beautifully balanced with the sumptuous, ceremonial *The Mayans*, an absolutely breathtaking pageant of gods and men and creatures.

In *The Mayans*, I was mesmerized by Onesimo Gonzales as the Prince. Not only was he dressed in the outrageously extravagant costume of Mayan warrior-royalty, but he himself, in profile, possesses the features you would only find in Mayan sculpture. It was like being in the presence of a hero of long ago.

Also from the past, or continuing past, into the present was *The Deer Dance*, a dance of the Yaqui Indians of Mexico, an unconquered, self-ruling people. Back to dance it again, after an absence of a season or so, was Jorge Tyller, a Yaqui, and nobody in the world can dance it as he does. He does not imitate a deer as it moves from freedom into the hunt and to surprised, unbelieving death, but he identifies both being and body with the reflexes of a wild creature. On one level, as a work of theater art, *The Deer Dance*, choreographed by no one person but, rather, by a culture, is as great as Fokine's immortal *The Dying Swan*. As an experience in witnessing the pulse of life interrupted, broken, and destroyed, it represents a shattering, and tragically beautiful, exposition of life and death.

For unshadowed beauty and happiness, there is *Wedding on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec*. It may be leisurely in pace, but it is all aglow in its stream of human loveliness, in its relating of romance to ancient ceremony, and in its linking of Indian Conquistador.

Throughout the program, the music lover, as well as the dance follower, could rejoice in the voices, both male and female, of the chorus, and in the sounds of the many instruments, ranging from the guitar, violin, brasses, and woodwinds to deep-voiced drums, primitive harp, flutes, and rattles which once long ago ca-

ressed or pierced the air of Mayan, Aztec, Toltec, and Tarascan lands.

The Juilliard Dance Ensemble has given its last formal performance in the spacious auditorium of its longtime home on Claremont Avenue. In the fall, The Juilliard School of Music will move to its new quarters in Lincoln Center, and the dance department, under the direction of its founder, Martha Hill, will continue to train students in ballet, modern dance, and related theater forms. The members of the Ensemble are, of course, dance students and all are required to have performing experience before graduating.

When William Schuman, composer and then president of Juilliard, invited Miss Hill, a widely respected dance educator (New York University, Bennington College, etc.), to establish a dance department at Juilliard in 1951, she insisted that the dance curriculum include two key techniques, modern dance and ballet, plus other forms that would make for the total training of "American Dance." She was warned that ballet and modern shouldn't go together and that you couldn't expect a dance student to move from Fokine to Sokolow and back again. But, as she says, "Maybe Bill Schuman and I were ahead of the times, or, perhaps, in tune with them."

At Lincoln Center, Miss Hill's department will continue to function under a faculty that includes Antony Tudor (ballet), José Limón and Martha Graham (modern), and other noted teachers. The School of American Ballet, the official school of the New York City Ballet and of George Balanchine, will be housed in the new building. It will be simply called the School of American Ballet at Juilliard, but its students will not be enrolled in Juilliard and the Juilliard students, since they will have their own ballet classes, will not be required to study with Balanchine teachers.

The final dance concert on Claremont represented Miss Hill's concern with turning out dancers equipped to carry out a variety of choreographic assignments. In fact, this year's crop moved easily from ballet to modern to the ethnic-flavored with no trouble at all.

The program offered the premiere of *The Pleasures of Merely Circulating*, a ballet by a comparative newcomer to choreography, and, until very recently, a most valuable and versatile dancer with the City Center Joffrey Ballet, Michael Uthoff; *Pas de Trois*, directed by Tudor, from the Petipa-Ivanov *Swan Lake*; *Echoes*, a new modern dance work by Anna Sokolow; and Limón's *La Piñata*, a dance of games remembered from his Mexican boyhood.

The Uthoff ballet, inspired by a line from a poem by Wallace Stevens and set to music of Handel, is a classical



The Mayans, a re-creation of an ancient heritage by the Ballet Folklorico of Mexico—Onesimo Gonzales possesses features you would only find in Mayan sculpture. He is the Prince, and Auda de los Cobos, the Princess.