

February, 1940, Dives in Legit Openings; 1 of 7 Looks Okeh

NEW YORK, March 9.—February, which once represented one of the peak loads in legit openings, had fewer openings this year than last. And of the seven openings this year, only one shows real signs of box-office life. Last year, out of nine, four did well. Critical opinion missed slightly on the one prosperous production. In a class by itself was the one-week return of *Taming of the Shrew*.

Two for the Show, 75 per cent, has had the following b.-o. returns: \$7,400 for first half week, opening having been on a Thursday; \$13,000, first full week; \$15,600, second week, which included

Washington Birthday matinee; \$13,200, third week; receipts for this week are about even with last week. House capacity is \$16,000.

Reunion in New York, 69 per cent, is doing fair business which, because of the co-operative set-up of this refugee production, enables the unit to be self-sustaining. Run at this rate will be indefinite. Angels are not expecting returns on investment, financing having been thru outright contributions.

Night Music, 44 per cent, closed after 20 performances. Business averaged about one-third capacity.

Unconquered, 13 per cent, played six week performances.

Another Sun, 6 per cent, folded after 11 performances.

Leave Her to Heaven, 6 per cent, will have had 15 performances to its credit at the end of this week. It closes tonight.

Taming of the Shrew, 100 per cent, was obvious, its success guaranteed by the hullabaloo for Finnish relief, for which it was giving a full week of benefits.

S. F. Sets Sked

SAN FRANCISCO, March 9.—Local legit season gets under way Monday night with Alexander Woolcott at the Curran in *The Man Who Came to Dinner*.

Others set for the spring and summer are *Romeo and Juliet*, with Vivien Leigh and Laurence Olivier, in April; Paul Muni in *Key Largo*, Raymond Massey in *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* (tentative), John Charles Thomas in a Los Angeles Civic Opera production, Maurice Evans in *Richard II* in May, Gertrude Lawrence in *Skylark* in July and Tallulah Bankhead in *The Little Foxes* in August.

New Plays on Broadway

Reviewed by Eugene Burr

ALVIN

Beginning Wednesday Evening, March 6, 1940

THE FIFTH COLUMN

A drama adapted by Benjamin Glazer from the published play by Ernest Hemingway. Staged by Lee Strasberg. Settings designed by Howard Bay, built by Nolan Brothers and Studio Alliance, and painted by Triangle Studio. Press agent, Joseph Heidt. Stage manager, Paul Porter. Assistant stage manager, Kendall Clark. Presented by the Theater Guild, Inc.

- Anita Lenore Ulric
- Philip Rawlings Franchot Tone
- Max Lee J. Cobb
- Antonio Arnold Moss
- A Soldier From New York Wendell K. Phillips
- Another Soldier Henry Levin
- Hotel Manager Emile Boreo
- Dorothy Bridges Katherine Locke
- Preston A. J. Herbert
- Petra Hilda Bruce
- A Signaler Henry Levin
- A Sentry Raoul Henry
- Another Sentry Michael Sage
- A Thin Officer John Gerard
- A Man in Civilian Clothes David Leonard
- A General From Germany William F. Schoeller
- An Orderly Philip Lewis
- Doyle Charles Jordan

- Holt Don MacLaughlin
- Hotel Electrician Sid Cassel
- An Assault Guard Michael Sage
- Private Wilkinson Kendall Clark
- A Man in a Brown Leather Coat John Gerard
- Another Assault Guard Raoul Henry
- The Butterfly Man Harry Davis
- First Waiter Sid Cassel
- Second Waiter Philip Lewis
- An Artilleryman Michael Sage
- Two Assault Guards Fred Catania, Peter Kredo

The Action Takes Place in and Near Madrid During the Early Winter of 1938. Scene 1: Rooms 109 and 110 in the Hotel Florida. Scene 2: An Artillery Observation Post on the Top of the Extramadura Road. Scene 3: A Room in Seguridad Headquarters. Scene 4: Same as Scene 1. Scene 5: The Same. Next Morning. Scene 6: Seguridad Headquarters. Scene 7: A Cafe. Scene 8: Rooms 109 and 110 in the Hotel Florida.

The Fifth Column, a play by that big raw-meat purveyor of the gullible early '30s, Ernest Hemingway, has finally managed to land itself on Broadway after a prize series of options, rewrites, news releases, stallings and a publication in book form. The Theater Guild rushed in where the previous angels feared to tread, presenting the piece in an adaptation by Benjamin Glazer at the Alvin Theater Wednesday night. And now all the delay becomes understandable; after looking at the piece in Mr. Glazer's adaptation one shudders to think of what it must have been like in the original Hemingway version.

Mr. Hemingway, as you probably won't thank me for reminding you, was the big literary muscle-man of what must have been a more innocent era, a writer whose diet was popularly supposed to consist of live bulls, eaten bleeding on the hoof. It now appears, however, that the bulls were a mental rather than a physical diet. For one act he gives us a session of raw meat that seems suspiciously like a left-over hamburger, and then in his last scene he settles down to do some serious thinking; and it is then that it becomes obvious that the bull went to nourish his mind.

The Fifth Column is a play about the civil war in Spain, and about those loyalists who were fighting against Franco's so-called "fifth column"—the body of Fascist sympathizers in Madrid who were hamstringing the loyalists from within. Two of the principal lads in this counter-espionage are a German and an American; the American is thrown off balance because he has to kill an enemy general in cold blood and because he forcibly seduces an American newspaper woman and then falls in love with her. He decides to chuck the whole thing, since the quarrel is none of his in the first place, and to go off to find happiness with his gal (whom, incidentally, he has known for all of 20 hours).

The play up to this point, tho badly and very loosely written and often painfully and self-consciously "tough," does manage to hold a certain amount of effect because of the excellent production provided by the Guild and the superlative direction of Lee Strasberg—direction that establishes Mr. Strasberg more securely than ever in the very top flight of the world's directors. But not even the Guild or its actors or Mr. Strasberg can do very much from that point on.

The loyalists refuse to let the American go, and the German, his friend, feels that the lad will be deserting the cause; so he goes to the girl, like Armand's papa in *Camille*, and tries to get her to give the boy up. She won't, saying some splendidly true things about the waste and danger of Americans enlisting in Europe's age-long wars. But the German gives what Mr. Hemingway evidently things are capping arguments about the war against Fascism having its front lines in Europe and about Americans doing well to fight there before they are forced to fight at home. And when the capture of Madrid by Franco seems certain the American decides to stay and die for the lost cause—surely a finely intelligent decision.

Mr. Hemingway's "thinking" in that last scene is as calmly reasoned as a Rube Goldberg cartoon, as thoughtful of his country's welfare as a war profiteer, and as intelligent as a Columbus Circle agitator. He makes his case woefully silly at the outset by taking as his heroes the Spanish loyalists who were fighting Fascism for the sake of Communism, that noble political philosophy which has as its keynote freedom (particularly the freedom of Finland). But the vicious foolishness goes far deeper than that. The quality of "thought" is best known

Theater Talk

By SHERLING OLIVER

Comes Spring:

"Such a number of young people are continually infatuated with the idea of a theatrical life that hundreds of both sexes every day run away from their employments and families to enter upon the sock or the buskin and ridiculously imagine because they see the performers of the metropolis parading it about . . . that they must make a very comfortable livelihood and follow their profession with no less pleasure than emolument. . . ."

"For the last twelvemonth I attended a spouting club in the city and was so much applauded that my vanity entirely got the better of my prudence and nothing would serve me but an appearance on the stage. . . . I engaged with the manager of a company who happened to be in town, beating up for volunteers, and set off, not doubting but the reputation of my performance would soon reach the metropolis and procure me my own terms.

"The very night after our going down *Hamlet* was to be performed. . . . In the morning I called on the manager to shew me the theater. . . . He carried me to an old crazy barn, the stage part of which was utterly unthatched, and even the audience end so very thinly covered that the least shower must be immediately felt by the whole company. . . . Warmd as I was with enthusiasm for the dignity of the drama, I could not help being mortified at seeing the professors reduced to such despicable circumstances. . . ."

"The curtain was preparing to draw up when circumstances happened that greatly disconcerted us. This was nothing less than a boxing match between the Queen and the beautiful Ophelia. There was but one white handkerchief it seems in the company, and this her Majesty insisted on having, as she played the principal character; the gentle Ophelia, imagining she had an equal right to so essential an ornament of tragic dignity, d—d the Queen for a brimstone and snatched it out of her hands. Instead of arguing as a meaner personage would have done, the Queen gave the presumptuous Ophelia such a stroke with her fist under the left eye as in a moment spread a circle around that delightful orb! This Ophelia returned with so much advantage as to deprive Madam Majesty of two of her fore teeth. . . . The manager and myself, by force of numberless persuasions and the prevailing rhetoric of a tankard of two-penny, fortunately produced a cessation of hostilities.

"The play opened to a brilliant audience of almost 14 shillings. . . . I was allowed to have executed my character to a miracle and heard myself mentioned with the first performers of the Kingdom. However, my share of the profits amounted to two-pence half-penny and four pieces of candle.

"Every performance has been a continuation of such bickering and misfortune. I have now been in this situa-

tion about six weeks; have studied near 20,000 lines and have scarcely got six shillings for my labor. We are all over head and ears in debt with the townspeople, and there is not a mother's soul of us in possession of a second shirt. The magistrates even talk of committing us. What will become of me God only knows." "A Penitent Prodigal."

The above was written, in its entirety, by a young man of good family in London 175 years ago. To be exact, in July of the year 1765.

Bits and Pieces:

Old Hickory, by STANLEY YOUNG, which T. EDWARD HAMBLETON bought for October production, presents a major casting problem. A star is wanted to portray Andrew Jackson from the age of 19 to 55. . . . JACK WOODS left last week for his home in Dayton, O. His mother is ill. . . . CORNEL WILDE has signed to play Tybalt and stage the fencing in the *OLIVIER-LEIGH Juliet*. He planes to the Coast for rehearsals this week.

WILL GEER'S benefit for dust-bowl migrants at the Forrest on the 3d turned 'em away. Further coin was garnered when the hat was passed at 11:30 p.m. for the privilege of remaining for an afterpiece. . . . ARLENE FRANCIS in Sardi's in a hooded ermine cape, looking like Snow White. . . . WHITFORD KANE and SARA ALGOOD supping there also. . . . *When We Are Married* is catching on. The other night a full house called on ALISON SKIPWORTH for a curtain speech. According to LEONA POWERS, "SKIPPY" stepped down to the footlights, looked over the audience and pleasantly murmured, "My! my! And the critics said this was a punk play!" . . . The ANNE MacDONNELL who played Imogene in the Studio for the Theater production of *Trelawney* is RAYMOND MASSEY'S niece. . . . JIM BACKUS and PETER BARRY spend off nights making dough with their sketches satirizing the theater's great. Last at the Fairway Yacht Club's Sunday night party. . . . DOROTHY ELDER indulged in a buffet supper Sunday. . . . Members of *The Fifth Column* had a long agony hour Wednesday night. Neither LUCIUS BEEBE nor BIDE DUDLEY aired their reviews. . . . GEORGE KONDOLF got his *Morning Star* in rehearsal the 7th. . . . The press agents of the town opposed hat-check girls on one of those radio quiz shows the other night and JOE HEIDT was the first to go down. Altho he publicizes *The Fifth Column*, he said Francisco Franco was an orchestra leader.

DONALD DAVID in NBC's television dept. . . . NICK DENNIS added to *Love's Old Sweet Song*. . . . MARC CONNELLY hopping back and forth between the Coast and BELA BLAU's office, trying to get a play ready for Broadway. . . .

A radio actor was annoying LUIS VAN ROOTEN by bragging about his new valet named Percival Eugene West. "Hmmm," hmmm LUIS. "PEW" for short!"

Review Percentages

(Listed below are the decisions of dramatic critics on the eight general metropolitan dailies concerning the Broadway shows of the week. In figuring percentages, "no opinion" votes are counted one-half "yes" and one-half "no" rather than being thrown out altogether. This would give a show with eight "no opinion" votes 50 per cent rather than zero. At the end of each month of the season the shows and their percentages will be listed, together with a resume of how they fared at the box office, in an effort to determine how much the critical reception affects the financial returns and how closely the critics agree with the decision of their readers.)

"The Fifth Column"—50%

YES: Atkinson (*Times*), Mantle (*News*), Watts (*Herald-Tribune*), Ross (*World-Telegram*).

NO: None.

NO OPINION: Brown (*Post*), Lockridge (*Sun*), Anderson (*Journal-American*), Coleman (*Mirror*).

"The Burning Deck"—0%

YES: None.

NO: Coleman (*Mirror*), Anderson (*Journal-American*), Lockridge (*Sun*), Ross (*World-Telegram*), Waldorf (*Post*), Mantle (*News*), Atkinson (*Times*), Watts (*Herald-Tribune*).

NO OPINION: None.

"The Weak Link"—44%

YES: Ross (*World-Telegram*), Watts (*Herald-Tribune*).

NO: Brown (*Post*), Lockridge (*Sun*), Anderson (*Journal-American*).

NO OPINION: Coleman (*Mirror*), Atkinson (*Times*), Mantle (*News*).

BROADWAY RUNS

Performances to March 9, Inclusive.

Dramatic	Opened	Perf.
Fifth Column, The (Alvin)	Mar. 6	6
Juno and the Paycock (re- vival) (Mansfield)	Jan. 16	63
Leave Her to Heaven (Long- acre)	Feb. 27	15
Life With Father (Empire)	Nov. 8	142
Male Animal, The (Cort)	Jan. 9	71
Man Who Came to Dinner, The (Music Box)	Oct. 16	168
Margin for Error (Plymouth)	Nov. 3	147
My Dear Children (Belasco)	Jan. 31	40
Night Music (Broadhurst)	Feb. 22	20
Philadelphia Story, The (Shu- bert)	Mar. 28	39
See My Lawyer (Adelphi)	Sept. 27	190
Skylark (Morosco)	Oct. 11	174
Time of Your Life, The (Guild)	Oct. 25	158
Tobacco Road (Forrest)	Dec. 4	2661
Two on an Island (Hudson)	Jan. 22	56
Weak Link, The (Golden)	Mar. 4	8
When We Are Married (Lyceum)	Dec. 25	88
Musical Comedy		
DuBarry Was a Lady (46th St.)	Dec. 6	110
New Hellzapoppin (Winter Garden)	Dec. 11	104
Pins and Needles (Windsor)	Nov. 27	984
Reunion in New York (Lit- tle)	Feb. 21	21
Too Many Girls (Imperial)	Oct. 18	156
Two for the Show (Booth)	Feb. 8	36