

Stem Production 800-to-1 Shot As 80,000-Plus Scripts Get the Scram — But Hopefuls Still Hope

NEW YORK, May 1.—Altho more than 30,000 dramas and musicals are copyrighted annually in Washington, and at least another 50,000 are written and submitted for production without bothering about a copyright, less than 100 reach Broadway showings. That means the chances are 800-to-1 against a playwright getting a professional Broadway showcase for his brainchild.

A study of the Bureau of Copyright's listings shows that 35,778 drama and musical plays were copyrighted during 1941. A few thousand were radio scripts—the rest were stage plays. Of the stage pieces only one out of every 40 were musicals and only one out of every eight had reached print at time of copyright.

There's a standing gag that one out of every three persons in the U. S. is writing or has written a play. That means 43,000,000 would-be playwrights. The truth probably is that millions of people try to write a play and that only a few hundred thousand each year actually write out one or two acts. Probably more than 100,000 actually write a complete play each year. And of this figure about 30,000 are copyrighted. The rest either make the rounds of play brokers or remain in the playwright's home, there to be dusted off occasionally when the scripser reads them aloud for the dubious benefit of luckless relatives or neighbors.

Paul Green, in an article in *The Sunday Times*, said 75,000 plays were written last year in the U. S. Barrett H. Clark, executive director of the Dramatists' Play Service, Inc., and a spokesman for the Samuel French Company, agrees that Green's figure is probably correct. Donald Douglas, of the Dramatist Guild, says he thinks one out of every three people tries at one time or another to write a play.

Apparently playwriting is as popular as ever, with the war no letdown. Those in the armed forces are turning out plays like mad. For example, the recent John Golden contest for one-act plays open to soldiers of the New York, New Jersey and Delaware area drew 114 scripts.

Clarks recalls that when he was with Samuel French he read as high as 2,000

plays a year, the peak being about 10 years ago (which was also the biggest year for copyrights of plays), and that he read about 800 plays annually for the Theater Guild and 150 for the Provincetown.

There are 700 to 800 playwriting courses in the country, and students write thousands of plays annually, says Clark. About 7,000 new plays make the rounds of the 22 play publishers each year. French is the biggest play pub and currently has a live catalog of 3,000 to 4,000 scripts. Clark says about 500 new plays are printed each year, mostly by French. Dramatists' Play Service has a catalog of some 300.

An interesting sidelight is that the number of plays copyrighted each year starts off lightly in January and mounts rapidly to a peak in December, when 10 times the number (compared to January) are filed at the Bureau of Copyrights.

Comparative figures of plays copyrighted during the peak year of 1931 and during 1941, listed by month:

	1941	1931
Jan.	509	572
Feb.	1,061	1,099
March	1,605	1,648
April	1,977	2,109
May	2,509	2,654
June	2,811	3,073
July	3,187	3,458
Aug.	3,604	3,949
Sept.	3,984	4,323
Oct.	4,165	5,050
Nov.	4,478	5,780
Dec.	5,183	5,993

TOTAL 35,778 39,708

Studying the figures it is obvious that more and more plays are polished up for copyrighting as the calendar year progresses. January's thinness might be due to too much Christmas shopping and New Year's Eve whoopee, making December a bad month for polishing up plays for January copyrighting.

Donald Douglas says at least three times the number of plays produced on Broadway are optioned each year. (Options are \$100 a month the first six months and \$150 a month the next six, except for revues.) Some plays earn several options and then never get produced anyway.

Any way you look at it the odds are against the playwright. But when he writes a hit he can earn hundreds of thousands of dollars in options, royalties; movie, radio, magazine and foreign rights; stock, amateur and stage rights; tabloid versions, operetta, opera and musical comedy adaptations, etc.

(How's your second act, brother?)

Legit Review Percentages and Critics' Quotes

Listed below are the decisions of dramatic critics on the nine 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 nine "no opinion" votes 50 per cent rather than zero.

"The First Million"—6%

- YES: None.
- NO OPINION: Earl Wilson (*Post*).
- NO: Otis L. Guernsey Jr. (*Herald-Tribune*), Morehouse (*Sun*), Anderson (*Journal-American*), Rascoe (*World-Telegram*), Kronenberger (*PM*), Coleman, (*Mirror*), Nichols (*Times*), Mantle (*News*).
- "A play that never seems to know quite what it's supposed to be."—Guernsey.
- "It puts the Ritz Theater back in the theatrical business—but not for long."—Morehouse.
- "Tho I doubt if you will be at all interested, it is my painful duty to inform you that a play called *The First Million* opened at the Ritz Theater last night."—Anderson.
- "Not only dull but stupid."—Rascoe.
- "Sort of a Tobacco Road without turnips and with shoes."—Wilson.
- "Jumps the sense of probability only to land in a ditch."—Kronenberger.
- "A thin little play, unnecessarily bawdy, often downright dull and beyond the limits of credibility."—Coleman.
- "Mr. Elliott will not make his first million on this one."—Nichols.
- "One Star. First audience seemed mystified and a little depressed, which was reasonable."—Mantle.

Balto Season Exits With 250G for 19 Shows; 2-Wk. 'Lady' 64G Tops But 'Army' (No Count) Drew 55G

BALTIMORE, May 1.—Local legit season, which closed week of April 12 with *Tobacco Road*, raked in close to \$250,000, for a total of 19 attractions. Better than the 1941-'42 season, which grossed approximately the same with 27 shows. *Lady in the Dark* led the field with a \$64,000 draw for a two-week run.

Boston night club fire and resultant investigation of theaters, which darkened the Ford Theater, almost brought the season to a premature halt in January, when all future attractions, including *Road*, scheduled for week of January 11, were canceled. Ford management, however, decided to resume operations at the Lyric, where last two attractions, *The Corn Is Green* and *Road*, were put on in April.

Weekly grosses (except where indicated) for the season, which started last Labor Day, follow:

September: *Private Lives* (Ruth Chatterton, Ralph Forbes), \$7,000; *Vickie* (Jose Ferrer, Uta Hagen), \$6,500; *Priorities of 1942* (Phil Baker), \$25,000; *My Sister Eileen* (Betty Furness), \$11,000 (return engagement).

October: *Guest in the House* (Nancy Kelly), \$9,400; *The Merry Widow* (Muriel

BROADWAY RUNS

Performances to May 1 Inclusive
Dramatic Opened Perf.

Angel Street (Golden)	Dec. 5, '41	588
Arsenic and Old Lace (Fulton)	Jan. 10, '41	1004
Blithe Spirit (Booth)	Nov. 5, '41	606
Counsellor-at-Law (revival) (Royale)	Nov. 24	181
Dark Eyes (Belasco)	Jan. 14	124
Doughgirls, The (Lyceum)	Dec. 30	145
Eve of St. Mark, The (Cort)	Oct. 7	239
First Million, The (Ritz)	Apr. 28	5
Harriet (Miller's)	Mar. 3	67
Janis (Playhouse)	Sept. 10	269
Junior Miss (46th St.)	Nov. 18, '41	598
Kiss and Tell (Biltmore)	Mar. 17	54
Life With Father (Empire)	Nov. 8, '39	1446
Patriots, The (National)	Jan. 29	108
Pirate, The (Beck)	Nov. 25	182
Skin of Our Teeth, The (Plymouth)	Nov. 18	190
Tomorrow the World (Barrymore)	Apr. 14	21
Uncle Harry (Hudson)	May 20	391

Musical

By Jupiter (Shubert)	June 3	366
Lady in the Dark (return) (Broadway)	Feb. 27	65
Oklahoma! (St. James)	Mar. 31	38
Revolving Stage (44th St.)	Oct. 28	125
Something for the Boys (Alvin)	Jan. 7	183
Sons of Fun (46th St.)	Dec. 1, '41	593
Star and Garter (Music Box)	June 24	358
Ziegfeld Follies (Winter Garden)	Apr. 1	36

Actors' Fund Meet May 14

NEW YORK, May 1.—Actors' Fund of America will hold its 61st annual meeting at the Lyceum Theater Friday, May 14. Expected that Walter Vincent will head the single ticket of officers to be elected at the meeting, with other incumbents being Harry G. Sommers, first vice-president; Katharine Cornell, second vice-president; Vinton Freedley, treasurer, and Robert Campbell, secretary. Open to public as usual.

Reports indicate that the fiscal year ended April 30 was the busiest in the Fund's history.

Duggan, McCurdy Team Up

PORTLAND, Ore., May 1.—William Duggan Jr., who recently resigned as manager of the Mayfair Theater, has become associated with Mrs. William B. McCurdy, independent booker. First production brought here under the Duggan-McCurdy banner is *The Chocolate Soldier*, which opened at the Civic Auditorium yesterday for a three-day stay. Booked for the immediate future are *Arsenic and Old Lace*, a return engagement, and *Porgy and Bess*.

Dunham 2,500, Portland

PORTLAND, Ore., May 1.—Katherine Dunham's troupe of Negro singers-musicians drew a satisfactory 2,500 paid admissions in a single matinee appearance at the Civic Auditorium. House sealed 85 cents to \$1.65.

Sgt. Stevens as Camp Impresario With Big Bagful

NEW YORK, May 1.—Sgt. Don Stevens, former secretary to Bill Morris, of the agency of approximately the same name, has been wowing the boys at Camp Lee, Va., with his directorial genius. Easter tableaux, dramas and musical clam-bakes are all in the Stevens repertoire.

Missive received from one of the boys in camp by a friend at WM says the tableaux, reminiscent of the Oberammergau play of Easter time, presented Good Friday, was something out of this world. In other vein, Stevens produced and directed an all-soldier version of *The Women*. On the fire is Sidney Kingsley's *The Patriots*.

Thomas Jefferson Theater, Camp Lee's outdoor spot seating 3,000, opens officially this month, altho the Easter puceant was staged in the unfinished theater.

Fields, Cole Up for Exam on 'Something'

NEW YORK, May 1.—Another examination before trial, this time of defendants Herbert and Dorothy Fields, writers, and Cole Porter, composer (not a defendant), is scheduled for Tuesday (3) in the infringement suit against *Something for the Boys*. On Thursday (29) attorneys for the defendants heard plaintiffs, James F. Waters and Alfred Shebel, producers of the radio show *Court of Missing Heirs*, who allege that the idea of the show starring Ethel Merman was stolen from their program.

As a result of the examinations, specific instances of alleged plagiarism have boiled down to the show's prolog, wherein a reference to the *Court* show was mentioned in a lyric (since changed) and four pages of the script, which it is claimed, infringe on one radio script in the series and a movie scenario based on the *Missing Heirs* idea. Plaintiffs had originally included the entire etlier series in the suit.

Case isn't expected to come to trial until next fall, since the four lawyers representing plaintiffs and defendants are far from thru with their examinations. Joseph Cohen is the attorney for Waters and Shebel, with H. William Fitelson representing defendants Mike Todd, Ethel Merman, Paula Lawrence, Allen Jenkins and Jed Prouty, all of *Something for the Boys*; Edward Kilroe is handling examinations for 20th Century-Fox (picture company has a financial interest in the show and is also a defendant), and Harry Weinberger is attorney for the Fields.

RKO bought the screen rights to the *Missing Heirs* show and used it in *Seven Days' Leave*. *Something for the Boys* will have a London production in August, under Firth Shepard's management.

B'way Loses, Army Wins Traube, Fields, Opdycke

NEW YORK, May 1.—Broadway producing offices are losing three of the season's most active participants to the armed services within the next week or so. Shepard Traube leaves his *Angel Street* (and *The Patriots*, which he directed) to represent him on the Stem while he assumes his duties as a captain in the photographic division of the Signal Corps starting next week. His producing company will be known as Shepard Traube Associates, with Mack Hillard as general manager.

William Fields, of Playwrights' Company, who handled exploitation for *The Pirate*, *The Patriots* and *Eve of St. Mark*, will report at Ottawa Monday (3) to be sworn in as a captain in the Canadian army. Philip Stevenson will carry on his chores.

Peggy Opdycke, assistant stage manager of *Oklahoma!* takes leave of the Theater Guild this week to train for the Women's Auxiliary Ferry Squadron at Avenger Field, Sweetwater, Tex. Miss Opdycke is the niece of Guild director Theresa Helburn.

Lee Simonson currently has an exhibit of drawings of some of his stage designs at William and Mary College, Williamsburg, Va. Simonson is also writing an autobiography, *Part of a Lifetime*, for fall publication.