

Off-Broadway Review

TOO MANY THUMBS

(Opened Wednesday, July 27)

CHERRY LANE THEATER

A fantasy by Robert Hivnor. Staged by Curt Conway. Setting and lighting by Charles Hyman and William Sherman. Stage manager, Anthony Franciosa. Press representative, Merle Debuskey. Presented by Off Broadway, Inc.

Fachye.....	Sadie Long
Smith.....	Dick Robbins
Johnson.....	Eddie Frost
Macklebee.....	Gene Saks
Jenny Macklebee.....	Kim Stanley
Too Many Thumbs.....	Nehemia Persoff
Professor Block.....	Ernest Sommers

For its second production, Off Broadway, Inc., that earnest experimental group which currently inhabits the old Cherry Lane Theater on Commerce Street, has chosen a new play, *Too Many Thumbs*, by a new playwright, Robert Hivnor. The group's invitation to the unveiling advised that "Broadway and Hollywood are nibbling at the script and are waiting to see what comes of our production." A reporter wouldn't know about Hollywood—it sometimes nibbles on extraordinary fodder—but it's a safe bet that no legit producer in his right mind would consider transplanting *Thumbs*, as is, to the Stem.

Just what young Mr. Hivnor is driving at is hard to tell. It may well be that, on one of the hottest nights on record, in a pew only a couple of degrees cooler than it was outside, a reporter may have missed some of the author's meatier implications. Hivnor is toying with jet-propelled Darwinian monkey-shines, with a fantasy about a chimpanzee who turns human via a series of Hyde-into-Jekyll body-aches in a couple of years' time. There is also a tepid love interest on the part of a devotee of pure science, who is compiling an "Ape's Progress," and the daughter of his superior, a somewhat bemused theologian. At all events, the ape appears to be on the receiving end of alternate doses of practical and spiritual advice during his growing pains. The spiritual wins out in the end, as he forswears the gal who has fallen for his handsome ruggedness and departs into the world with something of a messianic complex. It is quite confusing.

Earnestly Acted

The Off Broadway players act out these matters with earnestness and some conviction, and the setting of a zoological laboratory cut to the confines of the Cherry Lane stage rates a deserved bow. It could serve as a blueprint for many more pretentious productions. As written, the play is, of course, more or less a tour-de-force for the diminishing monkey business of Nehemia Persoff as the ubiquitous chimp. Personally, this reporter liked him best at his hairiest growling. Some of his latter scenes are a bit hard to take, but much may be blamed on the script. Dick Robbins contributes an adequate facsimile of a vacillating scientist, and Kim Stanley is a decorative other half of the romance angle. Gene Saks is properly annoying as her querulous papa and Ernest Sommers makes a really sharp bit of a chore as a visiting professor.

Over-all, the Off Broadway group seems to have plenty on the ball. They go about things with apparent skill and sincerity. This time they just picked the wrong play.

Bob Francis.

ROUTES Dramatic and Musical

Brigadoon (Curran) San Francisco.
Inside U. S. A. (Shubert) Chicago.
Kiss Me, Kate (Philharmonic Auditorium) Los Angeles.
Mr. Roberts (Erianger) Chicago.
Red Shoes (Belwyn) Chicago.
Red Shoes (Majestic) Boston.
Street Car Named Desire (Geary) San Francisco.

OUT-OF-TOWN OPENINGS

ANNIE, GET YOUR GUN

(Opened Monday, July 18)

GREEK THEATER, GRIFFITH PARK, LOS ANGELES

A musical comedy. Book by Dorothy and Herbert Fields. Music and lyrics by Irving Berlin. Presented by Gene Mann. Directed by Edward Reveaux. Settings by Richard Jackson. Musical direction by Jaye Rubanoff. Dances staged by Dan Eckley. Musical numbers staged by Eugene Loring. Costumes designed by Kate Drain Lawson. Production co-ordinator, Maryann Mann. Choral direction, Jack Cathcart.

Little Boy.....	Billy Sharbutt
Little Girl.....	Patricia Wright
Charlie Davenport.....	Donald Burr
Iron Tail.....	Eddie Ferguson
Yellow Foot.....	John Athey
Mac (Property Man).....	Kirby Smith
Cowboys.....	Bob Stephens, Michael King
Foster Wilson.....	Lindsay Workman
Cooley.....	Jerry Pederson
Dolly Tate.....	Lela Bliss
Winnie Tate.....	June Preisser
Tommy Keeler.....	Dick Humphreys
Frank Butler.....	Earl Covert
Annie Oakley.....	Gertrude Niesen
Minnie (Annie's sister).....	Patti Bell
Jessie (another sister).....	Anne Whitfield
Nellie (another sister).....	Susan O'Dean
Little Jake (her brother).....	Terry Goodwin
Harry.....	Bill Call
Mary.....	Dalors Bennett
Col. William F. Cody.....	Thayer Roberts
Mrs. Little Horse.....	Grace Poland
Mrs. Black Tooth.....	Betty Lou Wilson
Trainsman.....	Paul Harris
Walter.....	Charles Owens
Porter.....	Eddie Fullylove
Bidding Mistress.....	Ann Mauldin
Acrobat.....	Eugene Faucetto
Clown.....	Louis Weber
Maj. Gordon Lillie.....	Paul Maxey
Chief Sitting Bull.....	Zachary A. Charles
Mabel.....	Betty Bence
Louise.....	Mary Ellen Batten
Nancy.....	Sandra Annsen
Timothy Gardner.....	Linn Ledford
Andy Turner.....	John Athey
Clyde Smith.....	Livingston Smith
John Brown.....	James Morrison
The Wild Horse.....	George Zoritch
Pawnee Messenger.....	Stephen Conidine
Major Domo.....	Paul Harris
First Walter.....	Charles Owens
Second Walter.....	Eddie Fullylove

Debutantes:
Betty Bence, Mary Ellen Batten, Donna O'Leary, Sandra Annsen, Betty Cameron
Sylvia Potter-Porter..... Jenina Carroll
Girl in Pink..... Kathryn Steele
Girl in White..... Donna O'Leary

Gertrude Niesen romps away with all honors in this production of *Annie, Get Your Gun*, second in Gene Mann's summer series of outdoor musical comedy presentations. As the little sharpshootin' gal from the Arkansas hills, Miss Niesen turns rustic and seems to have as much fun doing it as the audience does looking and listening. The ever-versatile lady of song makes the most of her comedy lines and situations, playing Annie in a warm and affectionate manner, yet never overlooking the laugh possibilities. She takes in easy vocal stride such ditties as *Doin' What Comes Naturally*, *You Can't Get a Man With a Gun*, *Show Business* along with *Sun in the Morning* and *They Say It's Wonderful*. Theatergoers shrugging their shoulders at *Miss Liberty's* sour press notices found cause for renewed devotion to the Berlin pen in rehearsing *Annie's* melodically intriguing score.

Altho it ends up as a one-woman show Miss Niesen nevertheless has the fine vocal support of Earl Covert as Frank Butler. His voice offers a tender treatment of *The Girl That I Marry*, *They Say It's Wonderful*, as well as a rib-tickling duet with Annie on *Anything You Can Do*. Juvenile romance was pleasingly handled by June Preisser and Dick Humphreys whose dancing routines added to the enjoyment and won applause. George Zoritch presented a colorful and stirring Indian ballet number.

Over-all extravagance of talent, costumes and sets makes this production a second winner for Gene Mann's current season. Edward Reveaux's direction keeps the pace smooth, the tone light and airy and permits Miss Niesen's talents to enjoy full freedom. Richard Jackson's sets won spontaneous applause for a number of scenes. Of particular note was the hotel ballroom set for the second scene in Act 2.

Following up the outstanding production of *Show Boat*, Gene Mann's equally excellent *Annie* promises local musical comedy devotees a season of finely polished, professional presentations. As *Show Boat*, *Annie* is doing SRO biz.

Lee Zhitto.

MANHATTAN MARRIAGE

(Reviewed Wednesday, July 27)

GROSSE ILE HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM, GROSSE ILE (DETROIT), MICH.

A new play in two acts by Lynn Shubert and Robert Keith. Produced by James-Keith. Directed by Lynn Shubert and Robert Keith. Production manager, Edmund Cramer Jr. Scenic designer, Margaret Van Zylveld. Presented by the Actor's Guild.

The last production of the new Actor's Guild in their first season is a light comedy, occasionally played a bit close to farce. *Manhattan Marriage's* major flaws stem from a poverty of material. There is a tricky reliance at the beginning upon business and pantomime exclusively, something that can be brought off successfully only by topflight acting. In this, and subsequent briefer interludes, the playwrights appear enamored of their conception of stage business.

The play concerns the marital troubles of a young New York dress designer. The lad is devoting time to a smart department store buyer to close a deal to save his firm and his job. His wife wants a divorce. Then enters a professional correspondent. The lad's reluctance to get into the spirit of the thing, comic misunderstandings with the wife's parents, etc., add up to final reconciliation.

Not Broadway Stuff

Play is likely not Broadway caliber because of the peculiar local material, but it could well succeed on the road because of its heavy hamming and satirical treatment of the professional divorce correspondent as a subject of remote amusement. The writing is consistently lively but needs more meat and good gag lines.

The troupe works well as a group, with no attempt at starring. Co-author Lynn Shubert is a bit too boyish as a boastful captain. Ann Boothby and Robert Keith have some romping good scenes, solo and duo. Robert Spence, despite earnestness, lacks conviction as a lawyer. The conception of Georgie George, the correspondent, as a routine nitwit, is a minor masterpiece.

Haviland F. Reyes.

ROBERT'S WIFE

(Opened Monday, July 25)

THE BERKSHIRE PLAYHOUSE, STOCKBRIDGE, MASS.

A drama by St. John Ervine. Staged by William Miles. Setting by Robert L. Klein. Stage manager, David Weaver. Press representative, Thomas Morgan Jr. Presented by William Miles.

June Hanvey.....	Barbara Brady
Anne.....	Jane Du Frayne
Miss Orley.....	Eleanor Wilson
Sanchia Carson.....	Mady Christians
Dick Jones.....	Michael Dreyfus
Rev. Robert Carson.....	Byron McGrath
The Bishop of Winterbury.....	Lewis Martin
Mrs. Jones.....	Mary Elizabeth Aurelius
Bob.....	Howard Erakine
Inspector Lindsay.....	John Straub
Inspector Futvoye.....	Thurston Holmes
Mrs. Armitage.....	Amy Douglas
Rev. Arthur Jefferson.....	Kendall Clark

If any producer is thinking of bringing St. John Ervine's *Robert's Wife* to town, he'd better forget about it. It hasn't a chance. It's a windy yarn about the dual careers of a man and a wife, with undertones involving birth control, radicalism and quarrels between the high and low Church of England.

The play ran for two years in London before the war. But what interested them then will be a bore today. The opening night crowd—a full house incidentally—gave the play four curtain calls. But if you'd been rocking on a porch all day even *The Ladder* would get curtain calls.

Excellent Cast

Mady Christians is a brilliant Sanchia Carson. Byron McGrath, as her (See *Robert's Wife* on page 42)

Subway Circuit

AT WAR WITH THE ARMY

(Opened Tuesday, July 26)

FLATBUSH THEATER, BROOKLYN

A farce by James B. Allardice. Staged by Ezra Stone. Setting by Donald Oenslager. Press representative, Vince McKnight. Presented by George Brandt.

Capt. Ernest Caldwell.....	William Mendrek
2d Lieut. Davenport.....	Kenneth Forbes
T/5 Corporal Clark.....	Mitchell Agrusa
Corp. Di Ruocco.....	Ernest Sarracono
Staff Sgt. Krieger.....	Jerry Jarrett
A Soldier.....	Lamar Caselli
1st Sgt. Robert Johnson.....	Joe Maross
Staff Sgt. McVay.....	Joe Keen
A Lost Private.....	George Mosel
Pvt. Jack Edwards.....	Bernard Kates
1st Lieut. William Terray.....	Ty Perry
Millie.....	Joann Dolan
Mrs. Caldwell.....	Marion Sweet
Pvt. 1st Class Alvin Hawkins.....	William Lanteau
Colonel Davies.....	John Shellie
Helen Palmer.....	Norma Lehn

Ten years ago, the late Jules Leventhal had a couple of standbys which were always sure-fire titillation for a Subway Circuit audience. Whenever things got dull along the subway beat, he would recast an edition of *Brother Rat* or *Room Service* with the assurance of profitable business. *Rat* and *Service* were strictly of the George Abbott school of thought—gagged-up farces, gaited strictly for belly-laugh. Except that it is obviously topical, *At War With the Army*, should prove a worthy successor. *Army* has been staged by a George Abbott graduate, Ezra Stone, and is right in the tradition of a thread of plot, hyped with unashamedly contrived laugh situations, played at a furious pace and punctuated by slamming doors and occasional pratfalls. Whether the result stems from the scripting of author James Allardice or from Stone interpolations, there are some enormously funny moments—and assayed on a reception by Flatbush Theater customers, *Army* is right in the Subway Circuit groove.

Army only closed at the Booth Theater Saturday (16) after a 150-odd performance run, and the Stem cast, except for the distaff side, is practically intact. Donald Oenslager's excellent set of a Kentucky training camp orderly room has also been brought along, so, production-wise, the show retains practically all its original Broadway flavor.

Maross in Lead

Joe Maross took over the lead slot some weeks back at the Booth and gives a fine account of himself as the bored top sergeant whose love life, complicated with his efforts to get overseas, is the storyline on which the antics are hung. Jerry Jarrett's supply sergeant is still a top laugh-getter in the lads' unceasing battle with the brass, and Joe Keen and William Lanteau are high spots as a thick non-com and the company sad sack. Bernard Kates's black-mailing private remains a properly unpleasant thorn in the seat of the top-kick's pants, and Tad Mosel's panto of a transfer enmeshed in army red tape is again out of the top drawer. William Mendrek continues to make the best of his points as the harassed company commander, and Kenneth Forbes does well by his slightly cynical assistant.

On the fem side, Joann Dolan makes the slightly reformed, slightly pregnant camp trollop extremely funny—an excellent follow-up to Maxine Stuart's original Stem creation. Marion Sweet and Norma Lehn are adequate to their assignments as the henpecking, in-the-know captain's wife and another facet on the top-sergeant's heart interests.

Army skeds a road trek in the fall. This Subway interim booking should be profitable in keeping the company on its toes and likewise at the b. o. for the circuit.

Bob Francis.