National Repertory Theater Plans to Barnstorm with Top Plays

By
FREDERICK M. WINSHIP
United Press International

A permanent repertory theater serving the whole nation-a long unfulfilled dream -is about to come true.

The National Repertory Theater Foundation, which toured 58 cities and colleges in 30 states last season, is planning to barnstorm coast-to-coast with three plays beginning next fall. A busy staff is at work in a modest office near Manhattan's Beekman Place setting the intricate machinery of the ambitious tour project in motion.

The United States supports at least a dozen touring companies each season, but these provide mostly contemporary fare – hit Broadway plays and musicals. The National Repertory Theater (NRT) will flesh out the national theater scene with enduring plays of the past played by stellar casts.

If the NRT becomes a permanent adornment of American cultural life, the major share of the credit will be due the co-founders, Michael Dewell and Frances Ann Hersey, who won their producing spurs with two successful tours of the National Phoenix Theater in 1959 and 1960.

In 1961, they decided to inaugurate a permanent touring company for theater classics. The non-profit National Repertory Theater Fuondation was the result. Actress Eva Le Gallienne, who has founded two short-lived repertory theaters in her long career, threw her prestige behind the project and the American National Theater and academy loaned necessary funds.

Mary Stuart First

"Miss Le Gallienne co-starred in Schiller's 'Mary Stuart' for use in the Phoenix tour, and the whole idea of a theater on a national institutional scale just boiled up among us," recalls Dewell. "Miss Le Gallienne agreed to appear in our first NRT presentations – 'Mary Stuart' with Faye Emerson and Maxwell Anderson's 'Elizabeth the Queen'."

Last season's tour of 18 actors in the two plays cost $1 million, more than half of which was met by box-office income. The tour went $155,000 in the red, and a similar amount probably will have to be met annually out of gifts from individuals or industry donations. Dewell reports that to date the NRT has raised $130,000 of this subsidy amount for next season. Nearly a score of foundations have made grants to match public contributions.

Plan Three Plays

"We haven't decided just what we will do yet, but it will be three plays which are classics of different periods," says the dark, intent young producer. "Maybe they'll be Sheridan's 'The Rivals' (1775), Chekhov's 'The Seagull' (1896), and the Kaufmann-Ferber comedy classic 'The Royal Family' (1927).

"We're not a road company out for the old cash register. We are trying to establish a company with permanence and significance similar to the Comedie Francaise in France and the Old Vic in England, but travelling. There is not a big enough audience in New York alone to support this sort of project, but the country as a whole can do it. We hope eventually to have four companies touring at once on 52-week tours."

Scaled For Road

Dewell and Mrs. Hersey, ex-wife of novelist John Hersey, assemble their shows in New York. The productions are mounted by top designers and scaled for the road and varying theater requirements, unlike most Broadway productions that must be expensively "cut down" for touring. Dewell says designing directly for the road saves money.

"We try for productions as good or better than Broadway," he says. "We will use the star system because people want to see stars. We'll provide the kind of stars made by God and not by publicity. We have found that theater people in every department are very enthusiastic about presenting great literature of the theater to the nation as a whole."

When NRT put out a casting call for 14 supporting roles in 1961, Dewell and Mrs. Hersey had to audition 4,000 hopeful actors and actresses. Many great names have offered their services to the NRT, too, including Cornelia Otis Skinner, Julie Harris, James Mason, Eric Portman, Cyril Ritchard, June Havoc, Margaret Webster, Mildred Natwick, Farley Granger and Burl Ives. Miss Skinner told Dewell she would like to play Mrs. Malaprop, Mason Francies Othello and Ives has his eye on Falstaff.

Get Wanted Roles

"They'd be marvelous in these roles they've always wanted to play," says Dewell. "It's obvious that the commercial theater has not allowed these great actors to do what they really want."

The NRT travelled 50,000 miles last season, making stands ranging from one night to three weeks. The cast used plane, bus, station wagon, and train. The trucks that carried the sets and costumes were the largest of their kind in the world. The cast played to 250,000 persons. 50,000 of them students at reduced prices that were about double the cost of a movie. The top ticket price was $4.

"As the public increases its contributions to us, we'll be able to cut the box office price down," says Dewell. "It's my aim to bring student prices down to movie prices in four or five years so that the youth of the nation will come to love the theater at the right age. At present young people are priced out of the theater and many do not form the habit of theater-going that could give them so much pleasure in later years."

Chicago Has Group

Dewell has encouraged groups in many cities visited by the NRT to establish "friends groups." The Chicago group is the most active. About 500 persons there raise funds, see that NRT plays are taught in the schools, introduce the cast to little theater and college dramatic groups and schedule lectures by the cast, arrange backstage tours, and drum up publicity and radio and television interviews.

"We try to be a part of the life of any city where we play," says Dewell. "We want to restore the patron-actor relationship and give all our supporters all the rich rewards of patronship. We want patrons all over the country, not just big donors here and there."

Medford Responds

Dewell said the response from audiences from Northampton, Mass., to Medford, Ore., was "stupendous." Wherever the company presented more than one performance, the second night audience was bigger than the first and the third night even larger. In Arcata, Calif., the 1,000 seat rarely-used theater was sold out and 1,200 persons turned away. In Louisville, Ky., where only 600 persons turned out for "Music Man," more than 3,000 persons patronized NRT. People drove as far as 200 miles to see the company in Odessa, Tex.

"All this shows the country still cares about theater – in spite of years of apathy engendered by radio, television, and intermittent fare of musical comedies with second rate casts," says Dewell. "I'm not surprised that most older people have given up theater altogether. But colleges and universities are producing a whole new generation of drama lovers. The National Repertory Theater is going to fill their need."

more meat

more flavors

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MEDFORD MAIL TRIBUNE
MEDFORD, OREGON, THURSDAY, JANUARY 31, 1963

GIVES TOUR SUPPORT—One of the many stars who will tour with the National Repertory Theater is Eva LeGallienne who threw her prestige behind the project in its 58-city tour last season. Miss LeGallienne played the part of Queen Elizabeth in dramatic works by Schiller and Maxwell Anderson. (UPI)

Taking the Profit Out

Merchant Must Go Out of Business To Have 'Going Out of Business' Sale

By DICK WEST

Washington –(UPI)– Over the years, the "going out of business" sale has been as much a part of the American scene as the overdue charge account. If records were available I suspect they would show that several fortunes have been built by enterprising merchants who made a business of going out of business.

West

It appears, however, that this road to riches has now been closed.

The Federal Trade Commission, in a case this month, took the position that a merchant should not advertise a "going out of business" sale unless he actually is going out of business.

In the FTC's view, moving the business to a new location under another name does not constitute "going out."

Gad, sir! This is the sort of thing that is taking all of the profit out of bankruptcy.

The next thing you know the FTC will be demanding that "fire sales" include a conflagration.

As the patron saint of the American consumer, the commission, which undertakes to protect us from our own gullibility, has handled several other cases recently that I thought were of more than run-of-the-mill interest.

One of them involved a television commercial for a kitchen knife. It showed a salesman demonstrating the sharpness of the knife by cutting a nail in half.

The FTC charged that the commercial was deceptive on grounds that the salesman actually was using the back of the knife. It may have a point there, although it wouldn't matter to me personally.

When I get so mad I could eat nails, I don't really care which side of the knife they are carved with.

For that matter, any knife that would sever a nail would be a big improvement over the kitchen cutlery at my house. On some of the knives we have the handles are sharper than the blades.

Another recent case concerned a claim that a swimming aid "makes anyone unsinkable." The FTC said the device "will not, of itself, prevent all users from sinking."

The commission further alleged that the "money back guarantee" was misleading. Apparently, there was some chance that the guarantee would expire before the life guard fetched the buyer up from the bottom of the pool.

There also was a case involving table linens that were packaged in green and white boxes bearing a trade name that included the word "Erin" and showing a picture of a shamrock.

The FTC charged that the packaging misrepresented the origin of the linens, which were made in Japan. I would have guessed they were made in Denmark.

IT'S YOUR LAW

Respect for Law Makes Democracy Live

Editor's note: This column is offered as a public service by the Oregon State Bar. It is not intended as legal advice. If you have a problem, take all of the facts to a lawyer. A slight change in facts may completely alter the outcome of a case.

DIVORCE

"I want a divorce," are words spoken frequently in the average lawyer's office.

Few other statements reflect the intense, bitter, emotional struggle which has preceded their pronouncement. Yet in few other instances is the person more in need of sympathetic and competent counsel before his decision becomes final. For although nearly everyone knows the common grounds for divorce, few understand its full significance, and fewer still realize that at best, a divorce is usually only a partial solution of problems confronting a husband and wife.

As is well known by any lawyer, divorce frequently creates other problems, even more impossible of solution. This is especially true if minor children are involved.

Even though the public may accept with apathy a high rate of divorce, the law still favors the continuation of a valid marriage. Lawyers and judges also feel it is their duty to help perpetuate a marriage rather than to help dissolve it.

It is for these reasons that when consulted about a divorce the lawyer will make a detailed and searching inquiry as to the nature and background of the complaints. After being fully informed he may be able to recommend a better solution to the problem than a divorce. Thus he may aid in a reconcilliation and the re-establishment of a normal and harmonious home life.

Of course, if a reconciliation is impossible and one of the spouses charges that the other has been guilty of one or more of the causes for which a divorce may be granted, the lawyer consulted may begin the proceeding by filing a petition in court alleging such grounds and praying for a divorce.

HOLDS CONFERENCE

Washington – (UPI) – Secretary of State Dean Rusk will hold a news conference at 11 a.m. Friday, his 18th general news conference in Washington since he took office two years ago.

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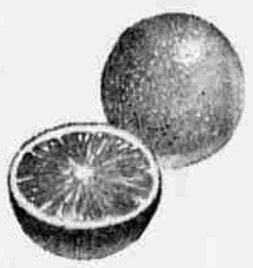

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