

Kronenberger

A Classic Is Done Over And Partially Done In

PM Reviews

BEGGAR'S HOLIDAY, an adaptation of John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* with book and lyrics by John Latouche and music by Duke Ellington, presented by Perry Watkins and John R. Sheppard, Jr., at the Broadway, with Alfred Drake, Zero Mostel, Bernice Parks, Avon Long, Mildred Smith, Jet MacDonald, Marie Bryant, Jack Bittner, Perry Bruskun and many others; staged by Nicholas Ray; costumes by Walter Florell; scenery by Oliver Smith; lighting by Peggy Clark; choreography by Valerie Bettis.

Beggar's Holiday, as the program says, is based on *The Beggar's Opera*. But it is so far from being a mere jazzed-up "revival" that it can best be described as a very laudable attempt to do something really different in the musical field. Exactly what, however, you never find out—for the crushing reason that its fashioners seem not to have known themselves. The praiseworthy thing about their show is that it travels its own road; the highly unsatisfactory thing is that it never fetches up at any destination. Despite energetic and excellent things en route, *Beggar's Holiday* leaves you, and itself, stranded.

Its failure to get anywhere may be bound up, more than at first appears, with where it starts out from. Jumping two centuries to the underworld of today, offering a new book, new lyrics and new music, *Beggar's Holiday* in one sense retains almost nothing of *The Beggar's Opera*—only the names and outlines of its principal characters, a similar enough story line, and (as a kind of memento) the words of one song. This is very little, but for all that it may have been too much, since it has often made for revamping rather than direct creation;

double-exposures rather than clear focus; and for somewhat muddled aims. *Beggar's Holiday* seems, so to speak, to have kept *The Beggar's Opera* in its head without letting any of it get into its veins. Now *The Beggar's Opera* is as 18th century as Hogarth; and its hard, high-spirited satire is directed at that passion for worldly gain which made double-dealing a commonplace, honor among thieves a joke, and the misdeeds of the underworld a symbol of the misdeeds of high life as well. In fact, the highwayman-hero Macheath was meant to be nobody less than Robert Walpole, the Prime Minister of England.

Well, all this might be disposed of as ancient history, except that *Beggar's Holiday*, without putting it to real use, has not quite disposed of it itself. Thursday night the ghost hovered over something that refused to seem very satirical, could not seem romantic, and was half-hearted in its melodrama. Nor, raffish as they might seem by musical-comedy standards, did the mobsters, molls and madams of *Beggar's Holiday* catch the pungency, the coldblooded, boisterous gaiety of *The Beggar's Opera*. They seemed afraid to take themselves seriously (which flattened out the melodrama), yet were not projected from any consistently comic point of view. Scoundrelly Peachum, for example, became a mere zany whom Zero Mostel absolutely mauled with his intemperate practices. But much of the trouble lay with Mr. La Touche's book (his lyrics were better). Mr. La Touche showed too much taste for sex, and very little taste beyond that.

But beyond its addled tone, *Beggar's Holiday*—simply regarded as a musical—is very uneven entertainment. It takes an unconscionable time to get going, and then it cannot keep going; a lot of it just falls by the wayside. Actually, the show is at its best when farthest from its source, when it is a matter of pure 20th-century jazz and jive. Most of Duke Ellington's score is nervous, rhythmic and individual, and a pleasant relief from stock musical-comedy "tunes." It also fits the dancing, and when *Beggar's Holiday* really comes to life, as it does for the last 20 minutes of Act I, it is immensely spirited and enjoyable. There are some good shorter stretches, too, and some nice people involved in them. Alfred Drake, who can do other things than sing well, is enormously helpful. I particularly liked Mildred Smith, and the dancing of Marie Bryant and Avon Long; and Oliver Smith's sets are excellent. *Beggar's Holiday* is independent-minded enough to deserve a better fate; but avoiding clichés is only half the battle.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

Draper and Adler Plan Extra Kids Matinees

Because of the popularity of the children's matinees being given currently by Paul Draper and Larry Adler at the City Center, three more have been added to the schedule, for the afternoons of Jan. 1, 2 and 3.

Other Critics on 'Beggar's Holiday'

Brooks Atkinson, Times: A flaring musical play in the modern style.

Howard Barnes, Herald-Tribune: Has lively accents, but for the most part they are incidental to a raucous and rather wearing song and dance exhibit.

Robert Coleman, Mirror: Left us as cold as the 15-degree breeze outside.

John Chapman, News: Most interesting musical since *Porgy and Bess*.

Richard Watts, Jr., Post: There is much that is good about it. . . . Nevertheless, it is difficult to escape the impression that the evening doesn't come off.

Herrick Brown, Sun: Tuneful, eye-filling and colorful, but repetitious and uninspired in most of its book to the point of dullness.

Robert Bagar, World-Telegram: A remarkable fusion of talents, creative and performing, culled from among superior white and Negro artists.

Robert Garland, Journal-American: What should have been a bright and bitter satire on the New York City underworld . . . ends by being something else again.

Opening This Week

LOVE GOES TO PRESS: Wednesday at the Biltmore—A new comedy by Martha Gellhorn and Virginia Cowles, presented by Warren P. Munsel and Herman Bernstein. With Georgina Cookson, Gerald Anderson, Joyce Heron, Nigel Neilson, Peter Bennett, Ralph Michael, Jane Middleton, William Post, Jr., David Tyrell, Don Gibson, Warren Parker; staged by Wallace Douglas; scenery by Raymond Sovey.

The Subway Alumni Get Licked Again

PM Reviews

TOPLITZKY OF NOTRE DAME, a new musical comedy with book and lyrics by George Marion, Jr., and music by Sammy Fain, presented by William Cahn at the Century, with J. Edward Bromberg, Betty Jane Watson, Gus Van, Warde Donovan, Estelle Sloan, Walter Long, Doris Patston, Marion Colby, Frank Marlowe, Phyllis Lynne, Harry Fleer, Candace Montgomery, Robert Bay; staged by Jose Ruben; dances staged by Robert Sidney; scenery by Edward Gilbert; costumes by Kenn Barr.

For the second night in a row a playwright has called upon Heaven to intercede with his earthbound characters. In this case an angel takes time from his Heavenly duties to plot a football victory for Notre Dame over Army. The result is a big, gaudy musical of the Before Ballet school complete with tap dancers, dope comic and several characters whose presence is rather inexplicable. To its credit are several good tunes, adept dancing by Walter Long and the singing of Betty Jane Watson. But it also has a book, an untidy and not particularly witty affair. *Toplitzky* has a few saving graces but not enough to extricate it from the frantic aimlessness which pervades it.

It is George Marion Jr.'s idea that the building which has been erected at Fifth Ave. and 51st St. across from St. Patrick's has nothing

Other Critics on

'Toplitzky of Notre Dame'

Lewis Funke, Times: Tried awfully hard to get over the goal line . . . but the plain truth is they didn't make it.

Otis L. Guernsey, Jr., Herald-Tribune: A mediocre musical which has all of the outer semblances of good fun without any of the inner sparkle to put it across.

Lee Mortimer, Mirror: A very gay musical comedy with a pleasing score, many laughs, some terrific dancing and one great moment.

Robert Sylvester, News: A fresh and pleasant musical with a cast of fresh and pleasant youngsters backed up by some sturdy veterans.

Vernon Rice, Post: A routine and indifferent musical comedy.

Homer E. Strickler, Sun: No gain for the Irish.

William Hawkins, World-Telegram: Studded with youthful talent and good humor and kicks up a swift pace across the stage.

Jim O'Connor, Journal-American: No All-American in the musical comedy field, (but) it's a pretty good show—with plenty of kick.



JANE MIDDLETON and JOYCE HERON in a scene from *Love Goes to Press*, the Martha Gellhorn-Virginia Cowles comedy which arrives at the Biltmore on Wednesday.

to do with Best and Co. but is really Toplitzky's Tavern, focal point for all of South Bend's subway alumni. Mr. T. has promised to provide the Irish with a football player who can beat Army in 'e person of his nephew who, however, turns out to be a niece at precisely the same time that an angel (male) arrives on earth solely to help Notre Dame beat West Point. Well, the angel is about to fall in love with the niece and is going to become Mr. T.'s adopted nephew so that he will be legally acceptable to Notre Dame when he is reminded by his Heavenly superiors that such entangling alliances are not for angels. And the Army game only one day away. *Quel* problem! There is also a gentleman just in from the Ould Sod who has a nephew of his own who plays football but, so far as I could determine, they were thrown in as a bonus.

Several capable performers bear down on this whimsy as though they really had something to work with. J. Edward Bromberg, making his musical comedy debut, works hard as Toplitzky but seems undecided whether he is supposed to be

a fast-talking straight man or back in *Awake and Sing* playing Uncle Morty. Gus Van sports a brogue as the recently landed Irishman and makes as much as any man could of a rather pointless role. Frank Marlowe raises a few laughs as a lout who wants to go to CCNY and a cute little blonde named Phyllis Lynne sparkles in two brief appearances. But Warde Donovan, in the important role of the angel, plays as though he were trying to see how long he could hold his breath.

The most satisfying thing about *Toplitzky* is Sammy Fain's score, notably *Love Is a Random Thing* and *A Slight Case of Ecstasy*. It's certainly not Mr. Fain's fault if many of the lyrics don't live up to his music. Robert Sidney has staged the dances with splash and vigor and Edward Gilbert's settings have color and imagination. The principal set, the interior of Toplitzky's tavern, is dominated by a large photograph of Knute Rockne who, from this vantage point, gazes down on most of the stage antics. Throughout the evening he wore a dubious expression. So did I.

—JOHN S. WILSON.

MUSIC CALENDAR

PAUL DRAPER and LARRY ADLER: Tap-dancer and harmonica virtuoso in a joint program: City Center, 131 W. 55, nightly at 8:30; through Jan. 5; \$2.40 to \$9.00.

FOR CHILDREN: Larry Adler, Paul Draper, the Salici Puppets, Bob Williams and his dogs, and Richard DuBois: City Center, 131 W. 55, matinees daily through Jan. 5 at 2:30; \$1.80 to \$9.00.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S CONCERT: American Youth Orchestra, Dean Dixon conducting. Program includes the opera *Hansel and Gretel*, in English, as staged by Queena Mario: Hunter Auditorium, E. 69th at Park Ave., Sat., Dec. 28 at 2.

RALPH KIRKPATRICK: Harpsichord recital: Town Hall, Sat., Dec. 28, at 3.

VICTOR STOTT: Latvian haritone: Town Hall, Sat., Dec. 28, at 5:30.

N. Y. JAZZ CLUB CONCERT: Mugsy Spanier, Georg Brunis, Edmond Hall, Baby Dodds, Joe Sullivan, James P. Johnson: Local Hall, 100 E. 17th St., Sat., Dec. 28, at 5:30.

YELLA PESSL and RICHARD DYER-BENNET: Harpsichordist and tenor: Town Hall, Sat., Dec. 28, at 8:30.

CHARLES WEIDMAN AND DANCE CO.: Central H.S. of Needle Trades, Sat., Dec. 28, at 8:30.

HOLIDAY JAZZ FESTIVAL: Hot Lips Fage, Neal Hefti, Charlie Ventura, Sid Catlett, Chubby Jackson, Dinah Washing-

ton: Town Hall, Sat., Dec. 28, at 11:30 p.m.

PHILHARMONIC-SYMPHONY: Leopold Stokowski conducting: Carnegie Hall, Sun. at 3.

Wir Clauben All' an einen Gott—Bach Symphony No. 1 ——— Brahms *Harvest Evening* ——— Siegmeyer *Finale of Act III of Parsifal*—Wagner *Francesca da Rimini*—Tchaikovsky

JOSEPH PIZZI: Accordionist: Town Hall, Sun. at 3.

CITY AMATEUR SYMPHONY: Leopold Prince conducting: Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th, Sun. at 3.

CHARLES WEIDMAN AND DANCE CO.: YMHA, Lexington at 92d, Sun. at 3:30.

HILDA KOSTA: Contralto: Town Hall, Sun. at 5:30.

IDA HAENDEL: Violinist: Carnegie Hall, Sun. at 8:30.

ELIABETH KABOOLIAN: Soprano: Town Hall, Sun. at 8:30.

LEAGUE OF COMPOSERS: Program of cantatas by Darius Milhand: Museum of Modern Art, Sun. at 8:45.

SYMPHONY CONCERT FOR YOUTH: Samuel Antek conducting: Alfred Gallodoro, saxophonist; Henry Morgan, narrator; benefit for Children's Welfare Program in France: Carnegie Hall, Mon. at 2:30.

MUSICIANS EMERGENCY FUND CONCERT: James Melton, tenor; Patrice Munsel, soprano; Robert Casadesus, pianist: Carnegie Hall, Mon. at 8:30.