

The Soapbox

Drama Conscious Harlem Old Emporiums Are Gone No Isms in "Macbeth" "It's Truly Wonderful"

By A. CLAYTON POWELL, JR.

HARLEM'S becoming drama conscious. At one time there were four swing emporiums in "Ole Harlem Town": Harlem Opera, Apollo, Alhambra and Lafayette. Here long before "swing" was coined Negro bands from pit and platform held "jam sessions." The Black Bottom and Charleston were tripped by one of the many chorine combinations. Blackface comedians had the customers rolling in the aisles and buxom browns moaned about "their man."

The unfailing law of those days was first that the comedians must not use new material. So—Johnny Hudgins with his unchanging "wa-wa"; Miller and Lyles always with their "figgas" and Radcliffe with his inevitable yodeling falsetto. Another unbreakable law was that blues singers had to roll their music in filth. This made the "double entendre" reach a new low in "Ole Harlem Town."

One by one the mud-movie houses have dropped out. Now the Apollo monopolizes Harlem's exhibit. Like all good monopolists, the Apollo shows are the "take it or leave it" type. Since it's the only flesh and blood showcase in this part of the county, the neighbors are forced to like it.

SUCH A situation created a natural for drama. And drama sure needed a natural to succeed. The ill fated stock company of "Sailor Beware" fame last spring sealed the doom. When the Lafayette closed then, whoever locked the door not only threw away the key but broke a mirror, walked under a ladder and was crossed by every black cat within hollerin' distance.

The WPA, armed with a stable full of horse shoes and a wallet packed with freshly amputated rabbits' feet, not to mention "numbers money," reopened the old hall. "Macbeth" has saved the day.

Gather 'round chillun, and let me tell you that this is a show. Some say that it departs pretty far from Bill Shakespeare's original. Maybe so. Maybe the old bard does turn over in his grave, but mark this. If he does, he says, "Truly wonderful." What I'm trying to get across is that "Macbeth" couldn't have been better even if produced by the Ministers' Conference and Brother Divine. One wise one has cracked, "Even if Shakespeare had written it it couldn't have been better." New tops were reached in direction, lighting, costuming, scenery, and acting.

THE MAY DAY boys, however, insist that the play lacks emphasis on the class struggle and is militaristic. Now there's something in this—maybe. At any rate, they further insist that Macbeth is a Fascist and Macduff a James W. Ford in disguise. At the conclusion of the play they would rather see raised aloft a red flag instead of Macbeth's head, with the audience singing the Internationale.

I'm not of glad, however, that here is one play stripped of "bourgeois," "proletariat," "Marxism," "Fascism" and "class struggle." And at 40 cents top class dramas sort of lose their attraction. Whether you're a Democrat, Republican, Socialist, Communist or Sufi-ite, here's a play that you can huzzah till the day you die. Asadata Horton's witch doctor and entourage will thrill you, whether you're a scab or a waiking delegate.

NO MATTER whether a rugged or a ragged individualist, Edna Thomas will warm you with pride. Edna Thomas climaxes a brilliant career in the theatre with her Lady Macbeth. Through this she can justly be called the First Lady of Negro Theatre.

Citizens, hie ye to the Lafayette. Give up your "truckin'" swing music, belly rollin' browns just for one night and see "Macbeth." The Negro Theatre is not sufficient, it must be the Negro's.