

WAY
BACK
WHEN



All This . . . And An Actor Too!

BY VERA MILLER

YOU excused yourself past a dozen pairs of knees, spent the evening in tears, inhaled vacuumed velour, drank mediocre flavored cold-drinks, and saw some of the oldest stage sets imaginable.

Now, not to be misunderstood, I hasten to explain that I love theatre, especially the old Yiddish theatre. That even more so than the evenings spent falling asleep as the theatre organist in the movie house played original pieces to the darting antics of the Hollywood names of the day.

Today, however, one must applaud the cinema tycoons who charge exorbitant rates for the superb talents of their research departments, make-up artists, stage and set technicians and sandwich between them supermarket food concessions during the period known as intermission.

MASS APPEAL

One must laud the fact that sandwiched between trick photography and trophy-minded symphony conductors, some brilliant publicist won his point by insisting on 'greater mass appeal' by the simple but effective method of employing in each extravaganza an actor!

An Actor . . . who holds up the entire performance while the rest of the cast moves through the story in various states of costume which avert the audience from the bland text of the script.

The Yiddish theatre was theatre—pure and simple. When you went to the theatre it was to see the actor or actress—perhaps; you had seen the play a dozen times before with other leading performers.

MASS PARTICIPATION

And the acting! The audience sometimes did as much as the performers on the stage with the 'shrieking' and 'gevalts.'

And what stage sets! Doors that creaked noisily as the erring daughter slipped out twixt the darkness of the script and the audience with the "macher." (At that point only the audience knew the 'Tsaunis' awaiting the heroine of this tragedy.)

The curtains used over and over again for each drama, the wallpapered floral backgrounds . . . used over and over they were, but who came to see fancy 'shmancy' . . . the play was the thing.

And during intermission, a table set up to serve cold drinks, 10 cent candy bars—(expensive!) chocolate covered cherries sold in little

boxes to be 'shared' by the group and all silver foil to be rolled up or flattened without a wrinkle to take home and put in the drawer.

By the third act, the stage relationships established by the actors/actresses took on realities and tears were cried and the play was a success. The applause for the final curtain may have been for the villain, but when the star removed the stage spirit-gum beard or wig and the overstuffed shirt, the play was then again applauded as a play—as a tribute to the writer, the director and the performer.

And more often than not, the after-theatre festivities were not the expensive entertainment that cost more than the actor made for the week; this was the kind of party held backstage or in a musty, crowded dressing room where friends and relatives gathered to give their opinions of what THEY, they who had SEEN the play and paid money for it, what they thought of the performance and the reactions of those who sat in the seats near them.

Well, who knows, maybe Herschel to some after-play gatherings and not being able to get a word in edgewise decided to grow up and become a critic.