

The Theater Season in Moscow

By RUTH EPPERSON KENNEL

THE Mall (Little), on the magnificent theater square just across from the Bolshoi Opera House, is the old dramatic theater in Moscow, where some of the actors have been playing for many years. It therefore smells strongly of the past, is fondest of old melodramas, especially foreign, and is popular with the older generation. But a new play "Zagmuk," by a Russian dramatist, the story of a serf uprising in ancient times, is creating general interest because of its beautiful staging and sensational plot. Lunacharsky's wife plays a leading role. Here we find some of the magnificent scenic effects of the Bolshoi: gray stone walls flung up against a deep blue sky are altered to form the different sets, a courtyard, a market place, the corridors of a palace, the walls of a city. The most beautiful scene is a rich interior in warm red and gold whose balcony looks out on the walls and parapets of a fortified city standing afar off against the stars.

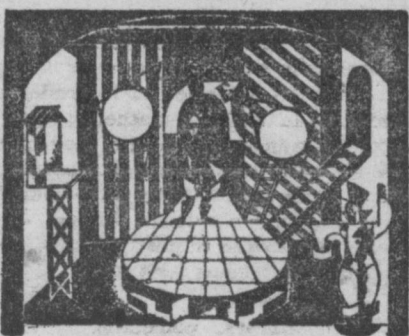
The heroine is sold by her father, in payment of a fine imposed by the overlord, and put up for auction, naked, in the market place. Her lover buys her, but the king sees and takes her for himself. One of the princes, a defender of the oppressed, befriends her and is consequently thrown into prison. There he plots an uprising to take place on "Zagmuk," the holiday of the serfs, the one day in the year when the people can do what they like. On this day, the king and his consort in magnificent robes mount their golden thrones raised on the stone steps outside the palace, and with impressive ceremonies liberate the prince, who is acclaimed ruler by the serfs. His first act is to demand the king's wife, and upon receiving her, he puts her up for auction, forced on his



A. V. LUNACHARSKY
Peoples' Commissar of Education.

ing her to disrobe. This is a signal for a general uprising of the serfs; the king escapes to his castle outside the city and long months of siege follow, during which the people feel that even their former life was preferable. Finally the king, by promising the lover the restoration of his bride, persuades him to open the side gate of the city. The hordes of soldiers swarm in and overpower the serfs. The girl, discovering too late the plot in which her lover has sacrificed his honor and his life, kills the king.

STILL another play of revolution and rebellion marks the close of the theatrical season. We find a suggestion of "The Hairy Ape," in the new play by Bill-Belotserkovsky, "Port Helm," or as the Russian has it, "Helm to the Left!" presented at a branch of the Mall Theater, an attractive studio some distance from the center. The time of the play precedes "Storm," being in the period before the revolution and at the beginning of civil war. The first act of the drama, which is in nineteen episodes, takes place on a foreign steamship just at the outbreak of the world war.



MASTFOR THEATER
Agitational Opera—Bouffe Scene

As in "Roar, China!" and "The Hairy Ape," we have a realistic picture of life among the workers. In the crew of the steamer the author has created strong, lovable heroes with whom we feel a comradely sympathy. So realistic is the atmosphere of tropical heat in which the screw laborers at the opening of the play, while the British captain and rich American passengers sit in steamer-chairs under canopies, that we ourselves almost drip with perspiration. And so vivid is the storm in mid-ocean that we feel the motion of the ship and the wind against our faces; it seems that we too are swept along the dark decks in the hurricane and finally lie panting with the sailors in their bunks. The five episodes of the first act take place on deck, in the captain's cabin and in the sailors' bunks, the walls of which, sliding back, throw open the cabins onto the deck. The fifth episode shows the arrival at the port of New York and the appearance on shipboard of various quacks and crooks, including the Salvation Army singing, "In the Sweet Bye and Bye."

The steamer set, with the aid of certain decorations, becomes a New York cabaret in the second act, where an exaggerated and false picture of the New York underworld is presented; as in the "Hairy Ape," the American millionaires are characterized as degenerate gentlemen in top hats and dress suits, who come to survey in coldblooded curiosity the antics of the prostitutes and pimps, and the sailors who have gathered here for recreation after their long voyage. This scene, devoid of originality, unreal and ugly (as a critic in "Pravda" has observed) is unworthy of the rest of the play. It could only justify its existence as an episode, instead of a long act, since it has no direct bearing on the plot.

In the third act, the immigrants are sitting about on the dock and our sailors who drift in, discuss the recent Russian revolution with a Russian immigrant, who later joins the crew. The appearance of a motion picture company and the commandeering of the immigrants to take part in the thrilling film of a Russian princess trying to escape from the howling mob (represented by three or four actors in Russian blouses and huge beards, and the immigrants at the dock who are instructed to pull out their shirts) makes a very funny climax to the act.

In the last act, back on the liner again, we find military discipline prevailing, as the steamer is carrying arms to the Russian White Guards and the crew preparing to mutiny. The play ends with the overpowering of the captain and officers who watch helplessly as the crew greets a Bolshevik cutter, and as the cheery command, "Left Helm!" is given, the steamer turns back without delivering the arms.

Adhering to the conventional forms of the Mall Theater, the production, while more realistic in some ways than "Roar, China," lack originality. The playwright, on unfamiliar ground in depicting foreign scenes and characters (albeit as a seaman he knows the life of a steamer), is less powerful than in "Storm." But the play on the whole has that wholesome simplicity and sincerity characteristic of the playwright and, in production borrowing somewhat from its predecessors, is a worthy finale to a brilliant season.

A PEEK EACH WEEK AT MOTION PICTURES

"MEN OF PURPOSE."

A GENERAL is at the head of the committee promoting this picture. A post of the American Legion presents it. The advertising of the picture urges: "Every American Citizen Should See It." So I did (at the Randolph). For all these reasons and because it is said to be the "Official Allied Production depicting the complete history of the world war"—"Most remarkable spectacle ever shown on the silver screen."

Well, it isn't. Tell it to the marines. It is neither "a complete history of the world war" nor the "most remarkable" blah! blah! blah! It cost me all of four-bits to see it and I can assure you it isn't. But it is a spectacle. A spectacle of outrageous war propaganda staged, as the picture assures you, "to show our government that we are ready to serve it in whatever need may arise," or words to that effect.

Just enough actual war is shown to serve the purpose of the legion-type patriots. You know the stuff: The kaiser was the scoundrel to blame for everything. We entered the war to save civilization, etc., etc. The war is pictured as a nice war. There are a few cooties, some mud and some dead bodies. But not too much. Not enough to discourage any young man from joining the marines. Should this picture have stirred you to patriotic action there is a marine recruiting sergeant stationed at the door. That's the kind of a business this is.



THE PASSAIC STRIKE—To be shown in Chicago, at the Ashland Blvd. Auditorium, Friday, Oct. 29.

MEN OF STEEL—A picture intended to make you kiss your boss every morning. (Roosevelt)

VARIETY—A truly splendid picture (Harding)

ACROSS THE PACIFIC—We are glad to credit George G. Nathan with this beautiful word of criticism: "Guano."

ALOMA OF THE SOUTH SEAS—Gilda Gray is a good motional actress (Uptown).

MARE NOSTRUM—War hokum. THE ROAD TO MANDALAY—Will someone tell us why they make these things?

SON OF THE SHIEK—Valentino. THE AMATEUR GENTLEMAN—The photographer is good.

TIN GODS—Reene Adoree is the best part of this.

LA BOHEME—A good picture. UP IN MABEL'S ROOM—Marie Prevost in chemise.

Note: Only Chicago theaters showing a program for one week are listed. Pictures of current week changed Monday.

"THE STRONG MAN."

IF you are tired of Indians, bad men, good women and heaving chests in the movies, see this picture. You will see Harry Langdon. Here is a first-rate mimic whose antics are a pleasure to see. One of these lucky days he is going to get something to act in that will give better scope for his real ability. When he gets it, this comic cut-up will take his place as a real comedian and second only to Charles Chaplin.

We advise you to see this picture (showing at the Oriental), if only to see Langdon with a most realistic and amusing cold. (If you can get any fun out of a cold!) It's so real it will make your nose run. It is also a bit of mimicry the equal of any we have ever seen anywhere. It would do credit to Charlie himself. Do you remember the scene in "Tramp, Tramp, Tramp" in which Langdon was "doped"? This is even better.

There is a good deal of waste motion in both plot and action. The plot is far below even the level of the usual comedy standard. And brother that IS low! However, there are occasional situations that are really laugh-provoking, and Harry Langdon makes most of these in true artistic fashion.

With all its faults, this is the kind of picture in which you will find a good deal of wholesome fun. If you are in Chicago you can easily risk seeing it. If you don't like the movie—there is Paul Ash. And if you don't like this Jazzmaniac—well, maybe you are growing old.



Harry Langdon
"The Strong Man"

THE THEATER

"THE COCOANUTS."

HERE'S something somewhat different in the line of musical performance. There is not a naked lady in it, nor is there a single bathtub! But you will find to compensate you for the loss of good nudity, good lines, good music, and the happy Marx Brothers.

If you care for musical fol-de-rol you will enjoy these fellows. Harpo, Chico and Zeppo Marx are clever chaps. Here is the old slap-stick art modernized and with intelligent handling. Each is a good clown. Groucho is a buffoon not only gifted, but also given a collection of good lines to speak. (The book is by George Kaufman.) Harpo is a likeable clown who doesn't speak, but lets his mimicry speak for him. These two of the Marx brothers particularly (there are four of them) are enjoyable fellows and a rare combination.

The music by Irving Berlin is nothing much to "write home about," but it is tuneful. The ladies are graceful and an eyefull. They are usually well adorned and plentifully so. An evening's performance filled with the antics of good comedians who work hard to please makes unnecessary much nudity to cover any lack of ideas and cleverness. The dancing is very good, and especially the numbers by the De Marcos, which will please those who lean to graceful motion.

You will find the ideas and plot the same old warmed-over hash. However, you will also find you won't care a bit as long as the Marx brothers keep clowning away. It's absurd stuff. It's low-down buffoonery that will make you forget your troubles for a couple of hours and rest your work-ridden carcass. It will even repay climbing those blamed steep steps which we humble have to climb at the Erlanger (old Palace) to get to the gallery seats.