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'Sign' Drops Stage Ratings As 'Untrustworthy Device'

by J. D. NICOLA

The "Sign" magazine, for many years a prime source of ratings for stage productions, has chosen to discontinue giving them because "they are by and large an untrustworthy device" and because the magazine's drama department now considers them to be detrimental to the formation of artistic judgment among Catholics.

For years, the "Sign's" play guide — which categorized productions as "family," "adults," "partly objectionable" or "completely objectionable" — was relied on by many diocesan newspapers to meet the requests of readers. Other national publications have imitated the "Sign's" classification of stage plays.

But in the September issue of the magazine, drama critic Arthur Cavanaugh strongly objected to play "lists" and suggested that the ratings would be abandoned by the publication, a move that was later confirmed in a phone interview with the Rev. Ralph Gorman, C.P. editor. (The "Sign" is published here by the Passionist Fathers.)

"No one," wrote Cavanaugh, who became drama critic of the

magazine last December, "should expect to attend the theater and find there only what is palatable, that which costily reflects one's own view of life. Catholics do not go to the theater; people do. What should be of concern to all who go is the artistic merit of what is being seen; and to form an artistic judgment, it is necessary to attend the theater, not to stay away from it. Lists most often accomplish the latter."

What prompted Cavanaugh to give his views on play ratings was the number of letters he received from Catholics who asked if they were permitted to see certain plays. There is no official Church agency that classifies plays because, as a Legion of Decency official put it: "Today's theater generally attracts a more sophisticated, less impressionable audience than do movies."

But conditioned by the Legion's film ratings, Catholic playgoers have asked for some answer as to whether a play is "acceptable" or "unacceptable." Observed Cavanaugh:

"The writers of these letters are obviously of good intent and admirable virtue, but perhaps they are also overly zealous, overly cautious, and unnecessarily concerned about the 'dangers' of theater-going."

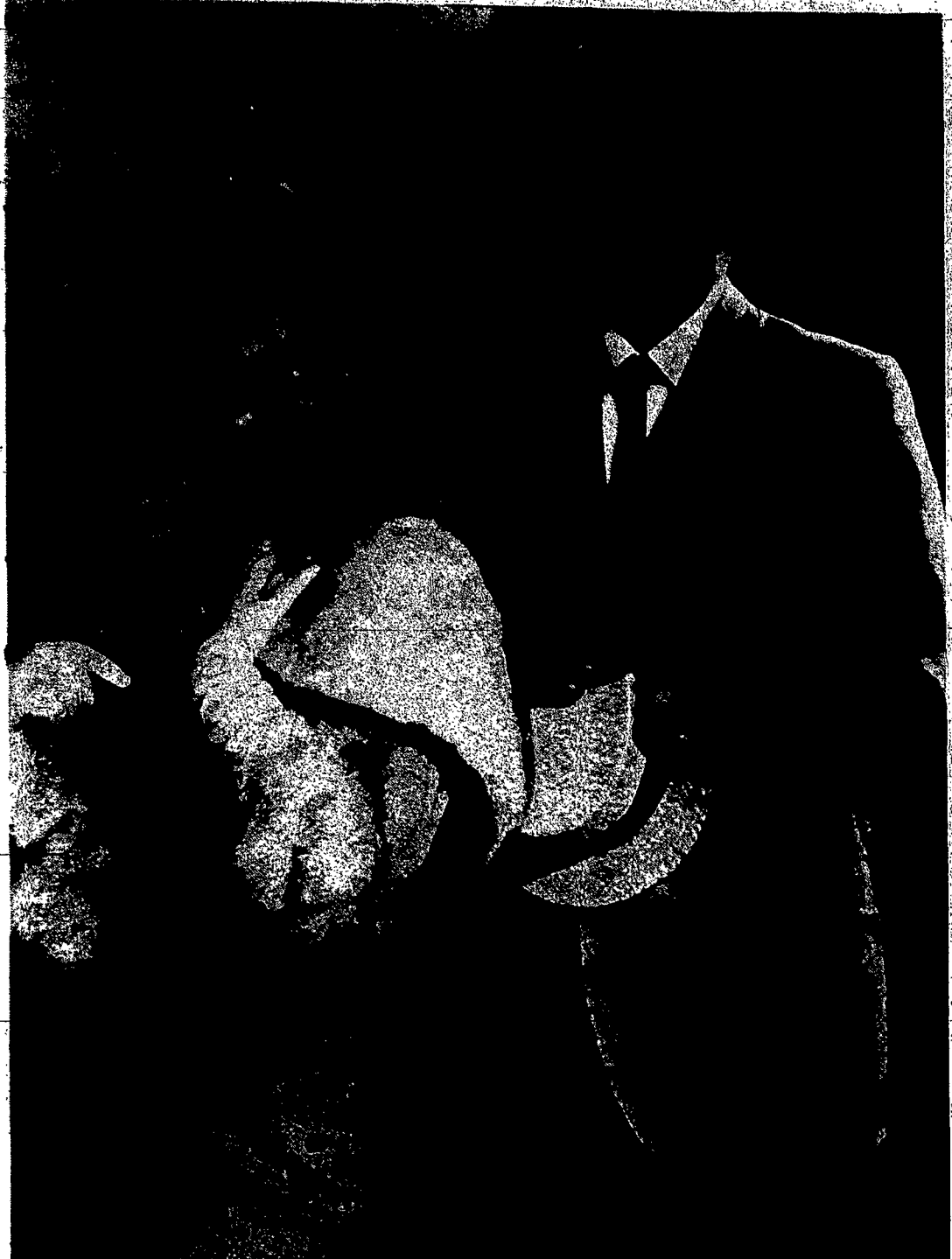
By-passing a common objection to play ratings — that they are one-man or one-woman opinions, as opposed to the consensus method used by the Legion of Decency — Cavanaugh dwelt on the difficulty of determining how a play can be rated for "acceptability."

"In the realm of the theater," he wrote, referring to lists, "they are by and large an untrustworthy device which makes use of a faulty system of categorization. . . . The fact is that very few plays can be judged on 'subject matter'; what matters is the handling of the subject involved — nor should it be required to be that which is acceptable to Catholics or any other special group. A play must be judged according to its creative use of the arts of the theater. The word 'art' implies balance, harmony, and a sensitive awareness of the nature of man. Given these qualities, there is no subject matter which is not acceptable."

"If there is a new breed of Catholic," he concluded, "surely it is the person who seeks to participate fully in the mainstream of contemporary life rather than to seek a safe, less turbulent sidestream, where all flows at an agreeable pace, without disturbance or controversy. In the world of theater, as in life, we should not love or deal with only that which we deem suitable."

Cavanaugh's criticism of lists for plays came not long after a similar complaint made by John E. Fitzgerald, film and drama critic for the "Sunday Visitor" newspapers. At the height of the summer-stock season this year, he wrote: "To say that a group of plays are 'completely objectionable,' even after admitting that a listing is 'unofficial,' is utter nonsense. Each production must be judged separately. I can name various shows that might well be objectionable but which, in another production, might well be unobjectionable; and vice versa."

A case in point is "A Funny Thing Happen On the Way to the Forum," which most lists labeled "completely objectionable." Joseph Larose, entertainment editor of "The Clarion Herald," official newspaper of the New Orleans Archdiocese, saw no "real danger to a mature theatergoer" and that it offered nothing more than "frequent opportunities for laughter." (Catholic Entertainment Features)



'Kiss Me Kate' Opens at Eastman

MUSIC THEATRE'S production of Cole Porter's musical "Kiss Me Kate" opens this evening (Friday, Sept. 17) for a seven performance run at Eastman Theatre. Sponsored by Rochester Firefighters' Benevolent Association, performances will also take place Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 18 and 19, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 24, 25 and 26. All evening performances are at 8:15 p.m. A matinee will be held Sunday, Sept. 26 at 2:15 p.m. In photo are JoEllen Dutton who will portray the title role and Dave Brazill as her wealthy fiance.

British Festival Weeks Scheduled at Sibley's

Mayor Frank T. Lamb will proclaim Sept. 18 to Oct. 2 of the building, which will simulate the famous Clock Tower on the Parliament Buildings. From this, the sounds of Big Ben will chime the hours during the Festival.

Scaled-down copies of famous British landmarks, such as Nelson's Monument, Parliament Buildings, Hampton Court, London Bridge and others, will be seen on the Street Floor.

Life-size figures in uniforms of Scots Guards and Beefeaters will be stationed in Guard Houses, on every floor.

Lamp posts and street signs of London, British flags and banners will help transform the store into a corner of Britain.

The Festival has been more than a year in the making. Eighteen Sibley people made trips to England, Scotland and North Ireland in preparation for the Festival, selecting merchandise, working with the British government and museums, researching historic sites in order to design authentic backgrounds for the event.

The British Festival is being presented by Sibley's with Her Majesty's Government, the British Embassy in Washington, and the British Consul-General in New York, as co-sponsors of the event in association with the city's leading cultural and educational institutions, who are staging special British programs and exhibits in honor of the Festival.

At Sibley's, the two weeks of the Festival will be highlighted by exhibits, displays, and valuable collectors' items loaned by British museums. Notable guests from the British Isles will be present.

Sibley's downtown store will be decorated and set with displays of the background to bring the pageantry of medieval and modern Britain to Rochester.

Some of these background displays are: an 88-ft. structure on

Spokesmen Testify On Film Censorship

Harrisburg, Pa. — (RNS) — A Protestant spokesman opposed a proposed movie censorship measure and a Roman Catholic representative endorsed the proposal in hearings before the Pennsylvania House Judiciary Committee.

Roderick J. Wagner, executive secretary of the social relations division of the Pennsylvania Council of Churches, ob-

jected to the censorship measure on grounds that "the cure may be worse than the disease."

The spokesman for the State Catholic Conference, George T. Lenehan, urged enactment of the measure as a means of protecting children from "exhibitions of sex and immorality."

Under the proposal, a three-member board of censors would

review movies and seek court injunctions against those it considers obscene. Courts would be required to take final action on the recommendations of the censors within five days.

Mr. Wagner, while stating that the Protestant Council notes "the desirability of restraint" on motion pictures, said it places more importance on "the inherent dangers of censorship."

"There is always the possibility that the cure may be worse than the disease," he said. "We feel that possibility exists in this instance."

Mr. Lenehan, assistant counsel for the Catholic Conference, said "the desire of motion picture producers to draw audiences at any cost has resulted in a disregard for the effects which blatant exhibitions of sex and immorality have on young and impressionable minds."

"The state," he maintained, "has an interest in protecting the special audience of children."

Trinity Freshmen

Six diocesan area girls are in the freshman class at Trinity College, Washington, D.C. Classes will begin on Sept. 22.

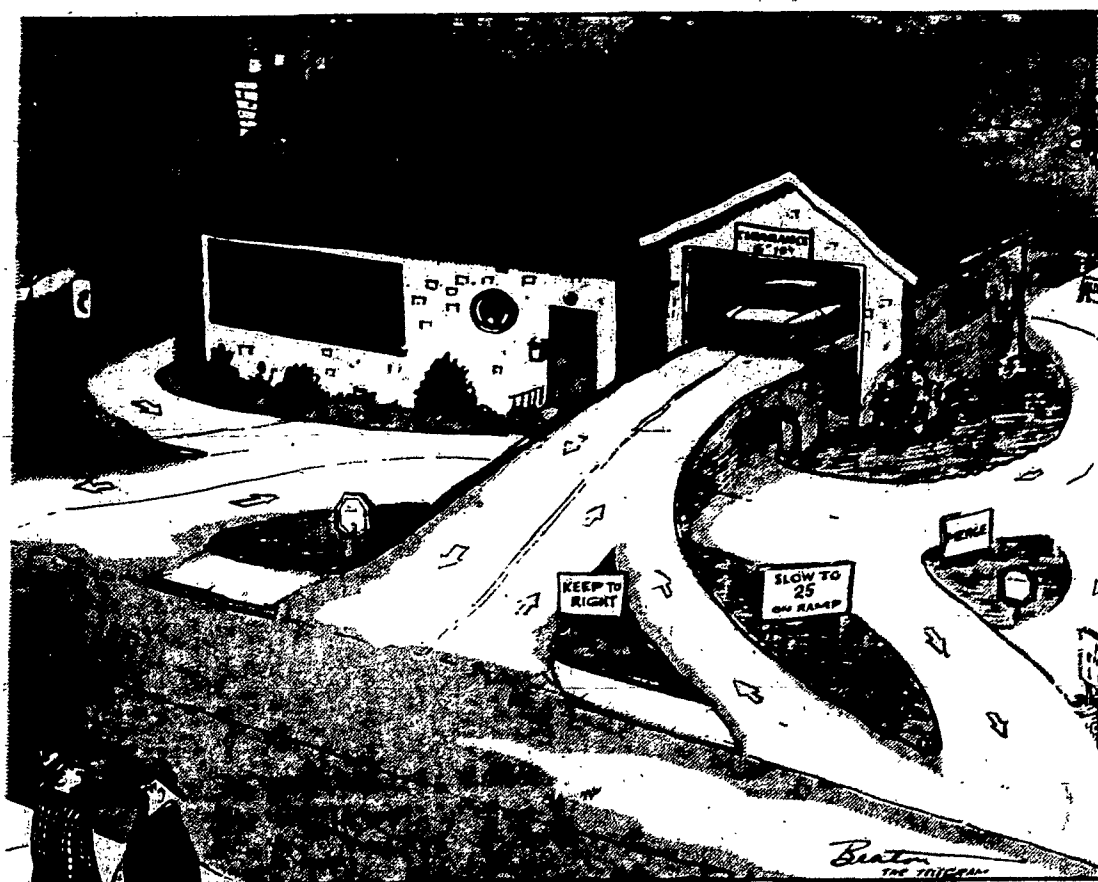
Enrolled with the other 366 young women are:

- Elmira: Kathleen M. Gaffey, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas M. Gaffey, 338 W. Washington Ave., Notre Dame High School, Rochester; Christine E. Dobbertin, Mr. and Mrs. Edgar W. Dobbertin, 15 Clover Park Drive, Our Lady of Mercy High School (admitted with honors); Ellen E. Hallett, Dr. and Mrs. Joseph J. Hallett, 232 Shoreham Drive, Mercy High; Martha M. Hanford, Mr. and Mrs. Henry S. Hanford, 1180 Clover St., Brighton H.S.; Marianne E. Tracy, Mrs. William A. Tracy and the late Mr. Tracy, 511 Dewey Ave., Nazareth Academy; Joanne Midey, Mr. and Mrs. Nicholas V. Midey, 88 State St., Seneca Falls, Mynderse Academy.



Fifty Years Together

Mr. and Mrs. Michelangelo Mazza of 50 Ridge Road East in Rochester, celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on Sept. 6 with a Mass of Thanksgiving at St. Michael's Church. Their children arranged a testimonial dinner for them, attended by relatives and friends. Entertainment was provided by some of their 40 grandchildren.



"HE DESIGNS HIGHWAYS . . ."

Engagements in Corning

Corning — Joseph Schroeder of 236 Walnut St. announces the forthcoming marriage of his daughter, Mary Ann, to Charles J. Faulstich Jr.

Miss Schroeder is the daughter of the late Mrs. Schroeder. Her fiancé's parents are Mr. and Mrs. Charles J. Faulstich Sr. of 74 Perry Ave.

Mrs. Margaret Amisano of 802 Larchmont Dr., Elmira, has announced the engagement of her daughter, Mary Anne Amisano, to Walter Poland, son of Mr. and Mrs. Walter L. Poland of 216 E. First St.

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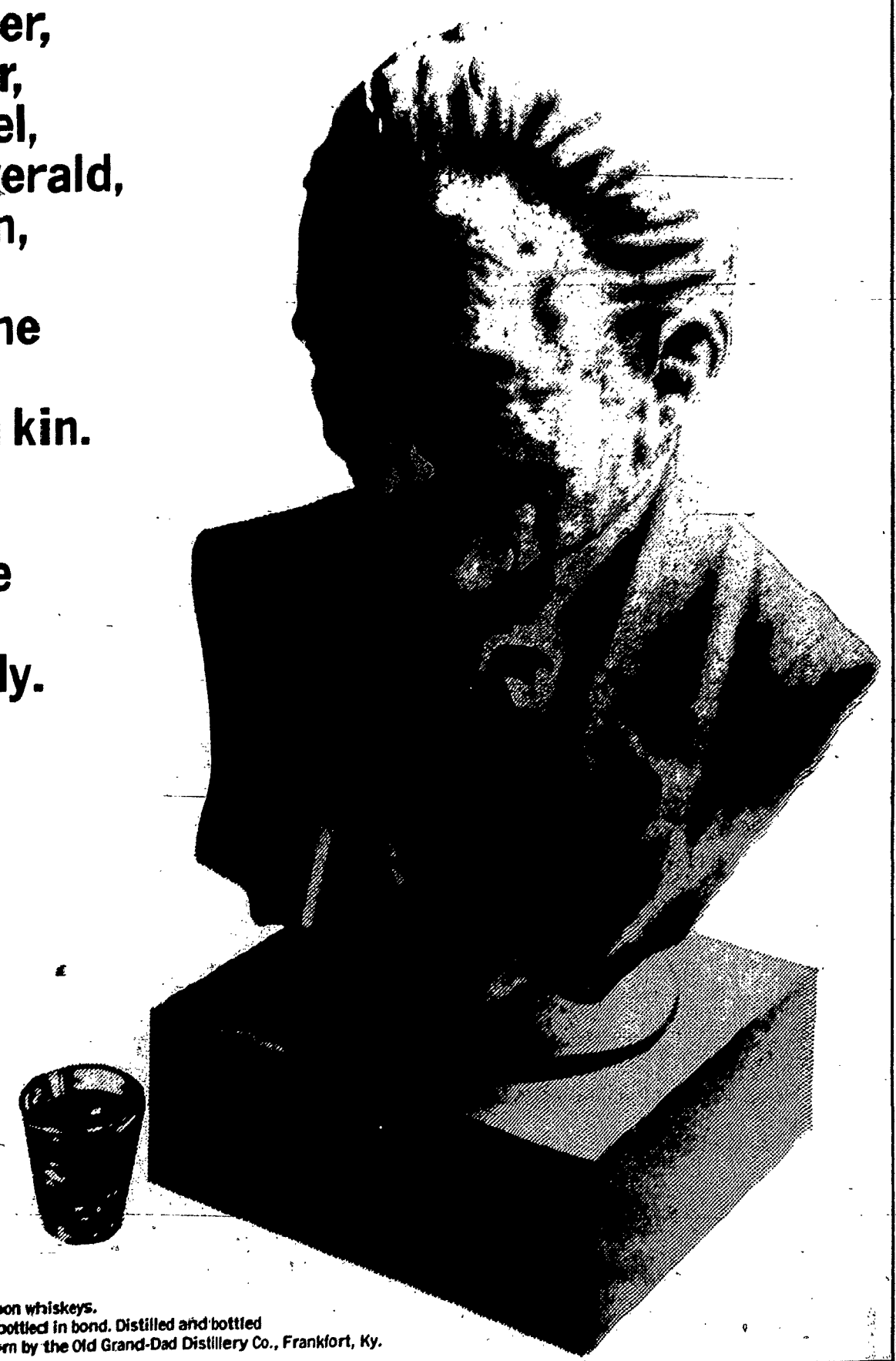
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