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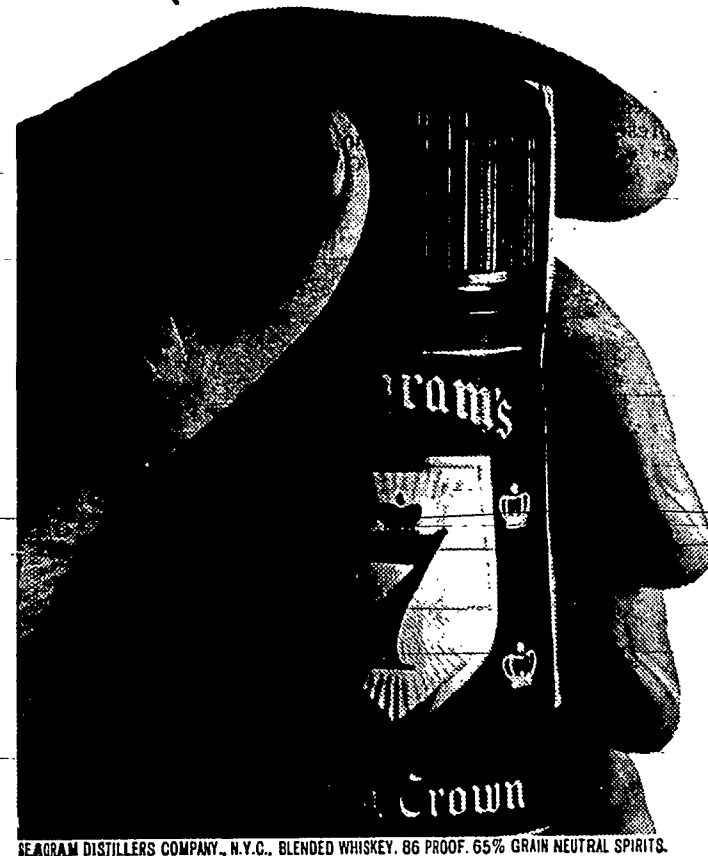
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High School Play Worth It?—Yes

By PAT KEOUGH

The final curtain closes on the last major production for another school year, and the thought re-occurs as it has every year since — who knows when: "Is it worth it?"

The scene is so familiar, so desolate: a dimly-lit auditorium, seats half-turned-up, scattered programs, a stray glove, a cigarette butt and the eternal wads of gum; a stage, forlornly empty, deafeningly silent; a shadowy figure crosses the apron to retrieve a limp bouquet, the last few stragglers from the audience brace themselves against the cold, voices drift up from the makeup room:

"I can't help crying, it's my last play."

"I'm NEVER going to take off my makeup!"

"How are you getting home from the party?"

Yes, it's worth it! For these boys and girls who have just produced McQuaid's *Oliver*, on Mercy's stage are like those hundreds of other young men and women whose names and show titles are etched on the back of the scenery. From that first painful experience of auditioning, to this equally, but somehow joyfully painful farewell, it is worth it!

Better Than School

A play like *Oliver* demands of its cast and crew a sense of the history of England in the 1880s — a knowledge of the language, the customs, dress, hair-styles, architecture, manners and social problems. To absorb information this way is a happier and more lasting knowledge than through a class lecture or a term paper.

Young Kevin Cauley is going to know better than most Dickens readers the horror of being shut up alive in a coffin. Petite Betsy Bourcy now shares the feelings of the unwanted, ungroomed "fat" girl in a way she never could, if she had not been padded with "hip" and "bosom" as Mrs. Bumble. Caroline Yeager's bruised legs and arms, her humming of that plaintive "As Long As He Needs Me" testify to her new understanding of life — of the woman who must helplessly and hopelessly go on loving an unworthy man.

A play like *Oliver* demands creativity and enterprise. The varied platforms must somehow depict the streets of London, the interior of a workhouse, the dark stuffiness of Fagin's hideout; but at the same time, strong enough to support the dancing feet of 70 chorus members. Lighting can create day-time and nighttime; the moods of joy or sadness; but while being artistic, it must give light enough to keep a sometimes awkward actor from plummeting off that 8-foot platform.

Long skirts, bustles, and hoops; beards, fat curls and gray hairs: all these are necessary to suggest the era or the character, but they must be securely created lest swarthy-faced Fagin suddenly becomes rosy-cheeked Tom Hodges.

A play like *Oliver* demands of its cast and crew humility, responsibility, teamwork. Young actors learn to accept direction and correction, usually in front of, if not from, fellow actors. They soon come to know, just as in life, that everyone can't be the lead, nor wear the most beautiful costume, nor appear young and handsome. They know that the play's final triumph depends upon everyone's doing his job, no matter how small.

Come To Life

But most important of all, a play like *Oliver* gives to its cast and crew of 100 members, an experience that is almost unfindable. As the gregarious and charming extrovert-director of the show, Father William O'Malley said: "I would probably still be a 'little goody-two-shoes

'Oliver' Makes Point

This is the season for school plays. Last week McQuaid Jesuit High produced a rousing musical *Oliver* before standing-room only crowds. One in the audience (a producer-director herself) mused on the value of such massive, weeks-long efforts which seasonally disrupt homes, school and young lives. Her meditation may console parents and school-administrators.



THOMAS HODGES

Rehearsing for "Fagin" role in OLIVER.

If someone had not gotten me up on the stage when I was in high school.

Out of those six weeks of singing, dancing, and acting; of painting, wiring, hammering and bulb-changing emerge, not only an entertaining show, but some wonderful new facets of these involved youngsters' personalities.

A "mumbles-Joe" suddenly begins to project so that he can be heard and understood. A talented, but selfish, girl suddenly sees that there is a wonderful joy in using those talents to create for someone else. A boy too shy to participate in class or appear on the dance floor suddenly finds out that he has a right AND a left foot. The "show off" is suddenly brought back to earth, usually by his fellow actors.

And when the actors come from an all-male school like McQuaid or an all-female school like Mercy—atmospheres where

boys sometimes tend to become rough, boorish, discourteous; and girls sometimes become small, catty, or authoritative—the give and take of rehearsal weeks help them to complement one another.

The girls become more helpful and feminine. The boys look neater, move to lift scenery, open doors and give technical advice.

Memories Never Fade

And the memories. Those wonderful, tearful, humorous days of the past bring such nostalgia. One hears alumnae reminiscing after returning to see what the new breed are doing.

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