

10k Tiger Standard  
 April 29, 1962

# Such a difference in 2 opening nights

WHAT a difference there was in opening night performances between the Frank Sinatra Show and the Garrison Players' stage version of "Caesar and Cleopatra," as written by George Bernard Shaw and produced by our Barbara Lawrence.

The Sinatra Show was packed for three consecutive nights and Frankie boy was great, so everyone thought. His show, moreover, was held at the City Hall's Concert Hall which seats over 1,400 whereas the "Cleopatra" play was held at the City Hall Theatre which has barely 500 seats. Opening night for the play, an ambitious local effort, saw only half of the theatre full, clearly showing that public support was lacking. The theatre should have been packed — but it was not.

## 9 scene changes

We are not attempting to make a comparison between the Garrison play and the Sinatra show. Sinatra is a big name in world entertainment and it was expected that his song recitals should have been well attended, as they happily were. Good for Sinatra, good for Hongkong and good for the local charities which benefited from the show.

What we are stressing is that the Garrison play, for all the efforts put into it, from a strong cast, producer Barbara Lawrence's vision of it to the excellent sets, costumes, lighting effects and overall high standard it achieved, deserved better houses. The play might be the thing but, without full and appreciative houses, the atmosphere is not quite the same.

What of the big stage at the theatre? Is it proving too much for producer, stage

hands and players to cope with?

It was apparent with all the prolonged delays that accompanied each change of scene in "Caesar and Cleopatra" — and there were nine of such changes — that the Garrison Players as well as the Hongkong Stage Club, for their future productions, will have to solve this problem. If not solved, it could be their Nemesis and undoing. Long waits tend to kill audience interest and the continuity of the play, as a result, is lost. Never was an opening night audience so sleepy and bored as on the opening night of "Caesar and Cleopatra."

There was a wait of about 10 minutes for each scene change. This, plus the two legitimate 15-minute intervals were spent for a play which, in actual performance, did not last half as long.

## Strong cast

The play, however, was undoubtedly a success. Producer Barbara Lawrence was congratulated by all whom she met after the play.

The two protagonists of the play, June Armstrong-Wright as Cleopatra and David Jordan as Caesar understood their roles which they cloaked with vivid acting. Jordan was particularly brilliant in the second scene of the third act.

There was not a weakness in the cast. Eileen Burbidge was a convincing Ftataeeta



● Barbara Lawrence... will she return to do another play for us?

and Brian Tisdall as Britannus practically stole every scene in which he appeared and his "hip, hip hooray" showed up one risible facet of the play.

Michael Meredith as Ra remembered (or recited) his lines very well in the long Prologue that was to have set the audience in the mood for the play until the infernal delays came.

Mention must be made of Michael Dickens as Pothinus whose murder by the slave Ftataeeta, who was carrying out the order of her mistress Cleopatra, showed how the latter had misunderstood her queenly tutelage by Caesar in her obsession for power. Dickens was strong in the role of Pothinus.

## Thomas convincing

Ted Thomas of Radio Hongkong was equally convincing as Rufio and seemed to be enjoying himself. He appeared natural in his scenes. We could not think of anyone else who might have fared better as Rufio.

Having watched some of the rehearsals at the Missions to Seamen, we have seen how the play took form. We can only hope that Barbara Lawrence will still be with us when the Garrison Players stage their next play. As everyone knows, she was flown here from Tel Aviv to produce the play — and she has done a magnificent job notwithstanding the difficulties she had to face.



● June Armstrong-Wright who did very well as Cleopatra in the Garrison Players' version of Shaw's play.

ScMP April 30

## 'Caesar And Cleopatra'

(To the Editor, S.C.M. Post)

Sir,—Reading Mr Hardie's criticism of "Caesar and Cleopatra," I cannot help feeling that his—reasonable—irritation at the incredibly slow scene-shifting affected his judgment in general, so that all the virtues of the production "in the general course take corruption from that particular fault."

Mr Hardie is of course fully justified in his basic criticism, that of the choice of play; Shaw, far more sternly puritanical than Caesar, was completely out of place in the excesses of the Egyptian court, and Cleopatra was not his kind of Superman; he tried to hide the defects of the play in settings of more-than-Oriental-splendour and variety. Mrs Lawrence was misguided to allow the scene-designer to follow Shaw's instructions so closely and to prepare sets of such size and complexity.

But let us allow that this production had the merits of its defects: when we did see the sets, they were imaginative, elegant and varied. Yes, of

course the cyclorama "glared;" but did we not have a good impression of sky and freshness in the open-air scenes, in contrast with those set in the murky (sometimes too murky) palaces and temples? The costumes, though sometimes at fault in details, were again imaginatively produced, and showed a good eye for colour. Most impressive, I found, were the details of the production: for example the handling of properties, which in many amateur productions makes one writhe with apprehension, was here managed with professional slickness.

## CAST WORRIED

The cast were obviously worried by the intervals between scenes, and the tempo suffered. However, the acting of each scene was beautifully coordinated, each actor having an understanding of the relation of his part, however small, to the whole. Mr Hardie sandwiches between the adverse criticism of his opening and conclusion some grudging praise for the principals (though I think few of his readers will realise this) so I will not mention them, save to agree with Mr Hardie in his approval of Caesar's great scene.

What is Mr Hardie's aim in such bitter criticism? I agree that the attitude which applauds all amateur productions merely because they are well-intentioned, is pernicious; but so also is the other extreme. It is difficult to find a satisfactory standard to judge by: one can always say, "I saw this much better done in London, or Paris, or New York," quite truly; but in what way can such criticism be useful? I imagine that the City Hall Theatre was planned primarily for amateur productions: maybe the Garrison Players fell in at the deep end with a splash with their unwise enthusiasm for technical effects of which they were not master; but is this not better than sedately dabbling a toe at the shallow end—or not venturing in at all?

Mr Hardie ends by piously invoking Shakespeare's name: I think we need the help of Shakespeare the man of the theatre, who was not afraid of innovation (it was a play of his that contained the immortal stage-direction "Exit: pursued by a bear"), rather than that of the respected playwright.

GLENDIA JONES.

ScMP - April 30

## Grain Of Salt

Sir,—As a comparative newcomer to the Colony I have been shocked by the devastating criticisms, based on first night performances, of "Caesar and Cleopatra," which appeared in your newspaper and in a sister daily.

In spite of these notices I went to the show on Saturday and was very impressed by the high standard of the acting, the beauty of the costumes and the general production, as was the rest of the audience, to judge by the ovation. I say nothing about the choice of play.

In conversation afterwards I learned that many seat reservations had been cancelled after the appearance of these notices, and that the house, except for Saturday, was far from full. This was obviously an expensive production, and the theatre is not cheap, so that the Garrison Players are now probably facing a substantial loss.

It is difficult to know what the dramatic critic conceives as

his duty in this business of his. Is it to work for the improvement of the standard of drama generally, or is it merely to advise his readers against wasting their money on a show which is not, in his opinion, a good one? If the latter is the object, then I consider these critics have served their readers ill in this case. If the former is the object then it would surely be much better if they attended a more representative performance than that of the first night, and published after the end of the show.

A few more efforts of this sort and they will be well on the way to putting our worthy amateurs out of business—or don't they care?

I assure you that whatever the critics say I shall not miss "Love of Four Colonels," and neither will the rest of your readers, I hope, for it is evident that the remarks of these gentry must be taken.

CUM GRANO SALIS.

ScMP June 12, 1962

THE  
**GARRISON PLAYERS**  
 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
 ALL WELCOME FOR ELECTION OF  
 NEW COMMITTEE AND DISCUSSION  
 OF PLANS FOR COMING SEASON

8 P.M., THURSDAY, 14th JUNE

at  
 KING GEORGE'S HALL MISSIONS TO SEAMEN,  
 Gloucester Road.

HK Tiger Standard April 29, 1962

# Such a difference in 2 opening nights

WHAT a difference there was in opening night performances between the Frank Sinatra Show and the Garrison Players' stage version of "Caesar and Cleopatra" as written by George Bernard Shaw and produced by our Barbara Lawrence.

The Sinatra Show was packed for three consecutive nights and Frankie boy was great, so everyone thought. His show, moreover, was held at the City Hall's Concert Hall — which seats over 1,400 whereas the "Cleopatra" play was held at the City Hall Theatre which has barely 500 seats. Opening night for the play, an ambitious local effort, saw only half of the theatre full, clearly showing that public support was lacking. The theatre should have been packed — but it was not.

## 9 scene changes

We are not attempting to make a comparison between the Garrison play and the Sinatra show. Sinatra is a big name in world entertainment and it was expected that his song recitals should have been well attended, as they happily were. Good for Sinatra, good for Hongkong and good for the local charities which benefited from the show.

What we are stressing is that the Garrison play, for all the efforts put into it, from a strong cast, producer Barbara Lawrence's vision of it to the excellent sets, costumes, lighting effects and overall high standard it achieved, deserved better houses. The play might be the thing but, without full and appreciative houses, the atmosphere is not quite the same.

What of the big stage at the theatre? Is it proving too much for producer, stage

hands and players to cope with? It was apparent with all the prolonged delays that accompanied each change of scene in "Caesar and Cleopatra" — and there were nine of such changes — that the Garrison Players as well as the Hongkong Stage Club, for their future productions, will have to solve this problem. If not solved, it could be their Nemesis and undoing. Long waits tend to kill audience interest and the continuity of the play, as a result, is lost. Never was an opening night audience so sleepy and bored as on the opening night of "Caesar and Cleopatra."

There was a wait of about 10 minutes for each scene change. This, plus the two legitimate 15-minute intervals meant that almost four hours were spent for a play which, in actual performance, did not last half as long.

## Strong cast

The play, however, was undoubtedly a success. Producer Barbara Lawrence was congratulated by all whom she met after the play.

The two protagonists of the play, June Armstrong-Wright as Cleopatra and David Jordan as Caesar understood their roles which they cloaked with vivid acting. Jordan was particularly brilliant in the second scene of the third act.

There was not a weakness in the cast. Eileen Burbidge was a convincing Ftataceta



● Barbara Lawrence... will she return to do another play for us?

and Brian Tisdall as Britannus practically stole every scene in which he appeared and his "hip, hip hooray" showed up one risible facet of the play.

Michael Meredith as Ra remembered (or recited) his lines very well in the long Prologue that was to have set the audience in the mood for the play until the infernal delays came.

Mention must be made of Michael Dickens as Pothinus whose murder by the slave Ftataceta, who was carrying out the order of her mistress Cleopatra, showed how the latter had misunderstood her queenly tutelage by Caesar in her obsession for power. Dickens was strong in the role of Pothinus.

## Thomas convincing

Ted Thomas of Radio Hongkong was equally convincing as Rufio and seemed to be enjoying himself. He appeared natural in his scenes. We could not think of anyone else who might have fared better as Rufio.

Having watched some of the rehearsals at the Missions to Seamen, we have seen how the play took form. We can only hope that Barbara Lawrence will still be with us when the Garrison Players stage their next play. As everyone knows, she was flown here from Tel Aviv to produce the play — and she has done a magnificent job notwithstanding the difficulties she had to face.



● June Armstrong-Wright who did very well as Cleopatra in the Garrison Players' version of Shaw's play.

## 'Caesar And Cleopatra'

(To the Editor, S.C.M. Post)

Sir,—Reading Mr Hardie's criticism of "Caesar and Cleopatra," I cannot help feeling that his—reasonable—irritation at the incredibly slow scene-shifting affected his judgment in general, so that all the virtues of the production "in the general censure take corruption from that particular fault."

Mr Hardie is of course fully justified in his basic criticism, that of the choice of play: Shaw, far more sternly puritanical than Caesar, was completely out of place in the excesses of the Egyptian court, and Cleopatra was not his kind of Superman; he tried to hide the defects of the play in settings of more-than-Oriental-splendour and variety. Mrs Lawrence was misguided to allow the scene-designer to follow Shaw's instructions so closely and to prepare sets of such size and complexity.

But let us allow that this production had the merits of its defects: when we did see the sets, they were imaginative, elegant and varied. Yes, of

course the cyclorama but did we not have a grepression of sky and fresh the open-air scenes, in with those set in the (sometimes too murky) and temples? The c though sometimes at fa details, were again imagi ly produced, and showed eye for colour. Most imp I found, were the details production: for example handling of properties, w many amateur prod makes one writhe with hension, was here manag professional sickness.

## CAST WORRIED

The cast were obviously ried by the intervals b scenes, and the tempo s However, the acting of scene was beautifully ordinated, each actor hav understanding of the rela his part, however small, whole. Mr Hardie sanc between the adverse criti his opening and conclusio grudging praise for the pr (though I think few readers will realise this will not mention them, I agree with Mr Hardie approval of Caesar's grea

What is Mr Hardie's such bitter criticism? that the attitude which a all amateur productions because they are well-int ed, is pernicious; but so the other extreme. It is to find a satisfactory stan judge by: one can always London, or Paris, or New quite truly; but in what v such criticism be usef imagine that the City Theatre was planned pr for amateur productions: the Garrison Players fel the deep end with a spla their unwise enthusias technical effects of which vere not master; but is t jetter than sedately dab toe at the shallow end— venturing in at all?

Mr Hardie ends by invoking Shakespeare's r think we need the h Shakespeare the man theatre, who was not af innovation (it was a play that contained the in stage-direction "Exit: by a bear"), rather than the respected playwright

GLEND A

ScMP - April 30

Scmp - April 30

## Grain Of Salt

Sir,—As a comparative newcomer to the Colony I have been shocked by the devastating criticisms, based on first night performances, of "Caesar and Cleopatra," which appeared in your newspaper and in a sister daily.

In spite of these notices I went to the show on Saturday and was very impressed by the high standard of the acting, the beauty of the costumes and the general production, as was the rest of the audience, to judge by the ovation. I say nothing about the choice of play.

In conversation afterwards I learned that many seat reservations had been cancelled after the appearance of these notices, and that the house, except for Saturday, was far from full. This was obviously an expensive production, and the theatre is not cheap, so that the Garrison Players are now probably facing a substantial loss.

It is difficult to know what the dramatic critic conceives as

his duty in this business of his. Is it to work for the improvement of the standard of drama generally, or is it merely to advise his readers against wasting their money on a show which is not, in his opinion, a good one? If the latter is the object, then I consider these critics have served their readers ill in this case. If the former is the object then it would surely be much better if they attended a more representative performance than that of the first night, and published after the end of the show.

A few more efforts of this sort and they will be well on the way to putting our worthy amateurs out of business—or don't they care?

I assure you that whatever the critics say I shall not miss "Love of Four Colonels," and neither will the rest of your readers, I hope, for it is evident that the remarks of these gentry must be taken.

CUM GRANO SALIS.

Scmp June 12, 1962

**THE  
GARRISON PLAYERS  
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

ALL WELCOME FOR ELECTION OF  
NEW COMMITTEE AND DISCUSSION  
OF PLANS FOR COMING SEASON

**8 P.M., THURSDAY, 14th JUNE**

at

**KING GEORGE'S HALL MISSIONS TO SEAMEN,  
Gloucester Road.**