

JOHN MASON BROWN

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 deeply, to live more fully, and to experience true passion and exaltation. "It is the record of splendid sinners, who just redeem themselves before taking off."

"Julius Caesar," another Shakespeare play classed as "presentational," called for a few laudatory remarks about the Mercury Theatre Group, which Mr. Brown regards as very important and significant. It is a young band of actors "polarized around Orson Welles." They have given this year, "The Cradle Will Rock," Dekker's "Shoemaker's Holiday," "Julius Caesar," and opened Friday night in "Heartbreak House." In the modern dress version of "Julius Caesar," "for once, Mr. William Shakespeare manages to escape the strait jacket of tradition." "Mr. Shakespeare," he went on, "has been in as much danger from his admirers as Mr. George Washington from the D.A.R."

The Mercury production was something more than a theatrical experiment. A political drama of today, it made fun of the modern dictator, it satirized fascism. Brutus is the modern liberal; Caesar scowls like Mussolini. Played against a background of brick wall and radiators, the darkness stabbed by spotlights, the play had remarkable power. A crowd dressed like striking taxi drivers, and storm trooper conspirators appear in it. All through, there is the ever-increasing scuffling of the mob, that unforgettable herd-like noise of people running.

"The Shoemaker's Holiday" has what the scholars call 'healthy animality of spirits,' remarked Mr. Brown. "At least, one can certainly say there are no innuendos. Dekker said what he meant, unblushingly!" The Elizabethan gusty spirit was retained in the Mercury production of this season, thanks largely to Hiram Sherman, who, Mr. Brown said, "Gave the best low comedy performance I have ever seen," and Edith Barrett, who left rather saccharine roles to play an Elizabethan slut.

Mr. Brown gave more credit to Burgess Meredith than to Maxwell Anderson for the charm of "The Star Wagon." Of it he said, "One of the most easy to enjoy, almost impossible to admire."

Another play dealing with the problem of time, although here the author, Mr. J. B. Priestly, looked forward instead of backward, was "Time and the Conways."

"On Borrowed Time," the most difficult play of the season to do justice to in a synopsis" was also "one of the tenderest and most beautiful productions of the year." Master Peter Holden, age 7, Mr. Brown declared was "the best child actor I have ever seen in the theatre, one without any 'brattish' qualities." The attractive, oathful, old man, who chased Death up the apple tree was Dudley Digges.

"Our Town," by Thornton Wilder, like Julius Caesar, was produced without scenery, but for a different reason. Here the author strips the theatre down to essentials, for he is trying to strip life down to its essentials. "He is writing about the eternal verities," said Mr. Brown, "The play is a picture of the burning, the growing up, the courtship, the marrying and the dying in a New England town." "If you follow the suggestions of the actors, you forget the lack of scenery." In speaking of the much-discussed graveyard scene in the last act, where the dead sit on straight-backed chairs, Mr. Brown said, "Mr. Wilder was faced with the problem of putting adequate speech in the mouths of the dead," and in consequence this scene does not quite come up to the first acts. Frank Craven, "one of our nicest actors," appeared in "Our Town."

"Susan and God," by Rachel Crothers, was the story of a silly, vapid, egotist (Susan) and the Oxford movement. An entertaining satire, this play probes no great depths.

Of "Of Mice and Men," by John Steinbeck, Mr. Brown said, "In no contemporary play is the tragedy of human loneliness more tellingly shown." A representational drama, it has the uncommon power of the novel, which Steinbeck wrote with the theatre in mind. "It should not

be compared to 'Tobacco Road,'" said Mr. Brown. "Steinbeck wrings beauty from an appalling crime," but "Tobacco Road," "which has become an American institution," wrings no beauty anywhere.

"Shadow an Substance," he said, is "The best play to come out of the Irish theatre since Sean O'Casey's 'The Plough and the Stars,' and 'Juno and the Paycock.'" "It shows integrity and a fine mind, and is as generous as the Irish themselves."

"Once Is Enough," with Miss Ina Claire, "is in the best white tie tradition of British drawing room comedy." It is built around a weekend party (all the people are lords and ladies, of course), and is very much fun, "All about whether Her Grace will be smart enough to keep His Grace from running away with another woman and creating a disgrace!"

In "The Sea Gull," by Chakhov, are Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne. Their bounding energy, their gusto,

their way of swooping into a play like a conquered town, are most dangerous in Chekhov. The tone of his plays is fatigue, frustration, passiveness. Mr. Lunt manages to achieve this necessary restraint, but Miss Fontanne appears in "the very reddest wig I have ever seen on any stage," said Mr. Brown, "and revealed everything in her first scene, that Chekhov had wanted to tell in four acts."

The musical comedy, "Virginia," was described as "the longest distance without any point." He was a very much kinder, however, to "Pins and Needles," produced by the International Lady Garment Workers' Union, and the current "Hooray for What!" with Ed Wynn.

The first "signifies a new epoch" as an intelligent musical comedy dealing with social questions — capital and labor and social security and such. The latter, a satire on war, is one of the best of Ed Wyn's stage efforts.

George M. Cohan in "I'd Rather

Be Right," is "An Aristophanic Revue." "The most important thing about it," remarked Mr. Brown, "is that it is at all." In no other country would such irreverent portrayal of prominent political figures be allowed. "Even in England, neither the public nor the lord chamberlain would quite understand."

A Taking Girl

She took my hand in sheltered nooks,
 She took my candy and my books;
 She took that lustrous wrap of fur,
 She took those gloves I bought for her;

She took my words of loving care,
 She took my flowers rich and rare;
 She took my ring with tender smile,
 She took my time for quite a while;
 She took my kisses, giv'n so shy;
 She took, I must confess, my eye;
 She took whatever I would buy—
 And then, she took another guy!

Hold Everything

The pee-wee auto was speeding fifty miles an hour. Every seventy feet, the little trinket would hop right upon the air about five feet. A cop finally brought it to a stop.

"What's the big idea of that car jumpin' that way?" asked the cop.

The driver answered: "There's nothing wrong with the car, officer. But I've got the hic-cups!"

Social Tact . . .

is making your guests feel at home even though you wish they were.

—Daily Texan.

Somewhere a Voice Is Calling

The air is tense; numbers are called; a hush falls upon the crowd. Women tremble; men swallow hard, striving desperately to hide their emotions. More numbers are called. Here a face grows luminous; there discouragement is evident. Then suddenly a demure voice is heard— "Bingo!"

—The Pelican.

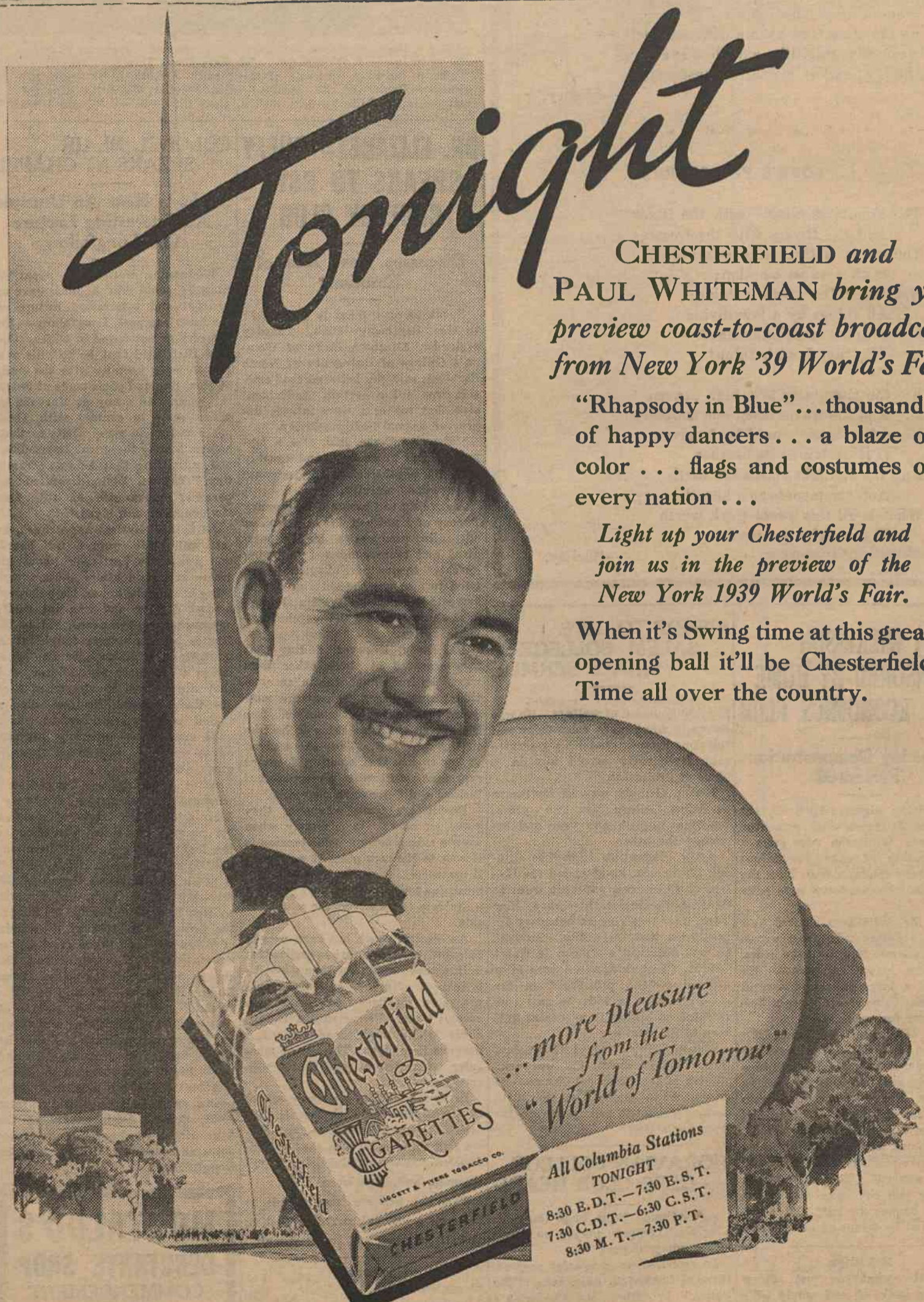
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