

# 'Once in a Lifetime': There's no limit to where the talkies are going

By MICHAEL McFEE  
DTH Contributor

"Wherever you turn, all you hear is sound." That wry aside on the movies comes in the first act of Kaufman and Hart's "Once in a Lifetime," the final Playmakers Repertory Company production of the season. But it might just as easily have come during the just-completed run of Chris Durang's "History of the American Film," a more recent comic screening of Hollywood and the dream of a nation.

The difference is in the telling. Durang's "sound" was the track to an uncertain kind of fury, wandering through years and ideas and movies with an attitude signifying something, perhaps, but I know not what. It was a considerable experiment and a considerable disappointment. "Once in a Lifetime," on the other hand, takes a much more modest and specific approach to studio insanity, and the achievement of the PRC is correspondingly less spectacular: it is pleasant, entertaining, affable enough stuff and a decent evening out.

If Durang tried to give us "film," Kaufman and Hart are showing us nothing but good old "movies" firmly anchored in tacky space and time. And what a tacky time: the coming of sound, the revolution of voice. "The Jazz Singer"—Vitaphone—talkies are the next step beyond silent movies and the legitimate theatre. The play presents a trio who are swept up in the gold rush to Hollywood in 1927, fired up by prophecies in *Variety* like, "There's no limit to where the talkies are going!"

Jerry (Joseph Cole) has the vision of Hollywood success after seeing the premier of Jolson's movie down at the Roxy: he is an opportunist ready to hop on the train to L.A.



The Playmakers Repertory Company presents "Once in a Lifetime" at 8 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. Tickets are \$4.50 weeknights and \$4.90 weekends, and are available at the PRC Box Office in Graham Memorial, the Print Shop and at Ledbetter-Pickard's.

and cash in on the studio panic. He easily persuades May (Darric Lawrence), who comes up with the idea of opening a "School of Elocution and Voice Culture" for all those squeaky-voiced silent stars. Only George (Gordon Ferguson) is slow to abandon their old small-time vaudeville act, but his hesitation is more personality than intelligent reservation, and he is soon in on the gamble. After a rapid combination of lucky breaks and bluffing (chance and resourcefulness—our national self-image), the three begin the humorous courtship of

fortune in the Glogauer studio which dominates the rest of the play.

It is not so much the narrative that attracts a viewer to the play as it is the amazing cosmos of characters which orbit across the stage. There are some 55 or 60 people constantly buzzing at the periphery or in the background: most of whom are dying to be introduced to someone who can introduce them to someone who can put them in pictures. Singing electricians and bellboys, a country girl and her dad from the sticks, playwrights from New York, and brain drain directors from Germany all melt in the teeming pot of Hollywood—some more successfully than others.

Add to this circus of character types the felicity of Kaufman and Hart writing. Their urbane observations of absurdity produce such comic incongruities as the casting

announcement made by an aide, "Mr. Glogauer will look at foolish virgins at 2:15!" Especially entertaining performers were Ronald Bishop (as Glogauer, the head of the studio) and Janet Foster (as his secretary Miss Leighton)—two physically perfect jobs of casting, the former is large and comically pompous, the latter is the small and courteous illusion of order. Frank Raiter is as wonderful as ever as Lawrence Vail, a displaced playwright-in-waiting who comes to realize "the most God-awful thing: nobody ever notices me!" Another refugee, ex-UFA director Kammerling, as played by Russell Graves, is also charming in his acceptance of the ridiculousness of the whole system.

The three main characters carried the weight of the play. Darric Lawrence was quite convincing as the thin, sardonic May, and Gordon Ferguson, as George, was consistently thick, lucky and lovable. Whether the small but distinct lack of credibility created by Joseph Cole's Jerry arises from the distasteful, reptilian nature of the character or from some flaw in his portrayal of the character, Cole remained the least appealing of the three.

Director Tom Haas came up with an inventive way to cover the rather considerable and frequent scene changes of "Once in a Lifetime." During these transitions and at the open and close of acts, a cabaret team of four—David Shepherd, Henry O. Arnold, Sandra Geiss and Marnie Carmichael—would croon tunes in a spotlight at the edge of the stage. They sang such fun numbers as "Hooray for Hollywood," "Shuffle Off to Buffalo," "Thanks for the Memories" and others. Haas also managed an elaborate and dramatically consistent curtain call for all the players in the vast acts, cleverly turning the lights, camera and action toward the naturally pleased audience at the last. No better guarantee of applause than to allow us to clap for ourselves.

The shoebox of a stage in the Playmakers Theatre was pretty obvious at times during

the production. With sets folding and unfolding, equipment like cameras and mikes piling up and the heavenly host of Hollywood flitting about, things got pretty crowded between the wings. It would be nice to have a theatre where the players don't have to lounge on cars out back between scenes.

Whatever the facilities, the PRC tried its

utmost to please with its last show of the semester. The unquestioned coup of the evening was the addition of dogs in a couple of scenes, which tickled the crowd as much as it fascinated the canines. Such winning, slightly audacious moments raise hopes of a really ambitious season next fall, one where every production makes the claim, "This could only happen once in a lifetime."

## KALEIDOSCOPE

### CINEMA

#### Campus

**Cape Fear**—A brutal, terrifying thriller about an ex-con (Robert Mitchum) out to terrorize the man who sent him to jail (Gregory Peck) and the man's family. Mitchum's large, powerful presence makes his character more believable and the film more frightening. With Polly Bergen. At 8 p.m. Wednesday in Carroll Hall. Free with a student ID.

#### Chapel Hill

For local theatres see advertisements on p. 4.

### TELEVISION

**Six American Families**—This series' fourth installment examines the George family, upwardly mobile blacks from Queens, N.Y. Both Bob and Peggy were children of the ghetto but vowed to escape its grinding poverty. Now, with their three children, a suburban home and a combined income of more than \$30,000, the Georges are solidly entrenched in the middle class. At 8 tonight on Channel 4.

**Palliers**—In Part 13, Glencora dabbles in politics to block the appointment of the disagreeable Mr. Bonteen as Chancellor of the Exchequer. At 9 tonight on Channel 4.

**Best Sellers**—Rory accedes to his father's wishes and opens a campaign for the 1912 Presidential nomination in the conclusion of *Captains and the Kings*. At 9 tonight on Channel 28.

**Soundstage**—Soul group the Spinners are seen in concert, on a basketball court with the Chicago Bulls and talking with ghetto youngsters. At 10 tonight on Channel 4.

**American Short Story**—Stories by Ernest Hemingway and Richard Wright... Hemingway's *Soldier's Home* focuses on a troubled World War I veteran unable to adapt to his placid rural hometown. In Wright's *Almost A Man*, Levar Burton plays a teen-age field hand who impulsively decides to prove his manhood by buying a gun. At 8 p.m. Tuesday on Channel 4.

**Ann-Margret Special**—On stage at Nashville's Grand Ole Opry, Ann-Margret plays host to Bob Hope, Perry Como, Minnie Pearl and Chet Atkins. In a highlight of the show, Ann-Margret and a chorus dance to excerpts from Aaron Copland's *Rodeo*, *Billy the Kid* and *Appalachian Spring*. At 9 p.m. Tuesday on Channel 28.

**CBS Reports**—Baseball's new era—the era of free agents, player agents, million-dollar bonuses and long term contracts—is the subject of *The Baseball Business*. Host Bill Moyers focuses his attention on the New York Yankees, following them from spring training through opening day. At 10 p.m. Tuesday on Channels 2 and 11.

**Carolina Quiz Bowl**—Teams of students from North Carolina State, UNC Chapel Hill, Eastern Carolina and Davidson compete in a three-round elimination contest. At 10 p.m. Tuesday on Channel 4.

**El Condor**—Jim Brown, Lee Van Cleef and a band of Apaches assault this Mexican fortress believed to contain a fortune in gold.

**Theatre in America**—Dreams and reality are interwoven in *The Prince of Homburg*, Heinrich von Kleist's 1811 play. Frank Langella has the title role in this drama about an impetuous general who is condemned to death for leading an unauthorized—though victorious—cavalry charge. At 9 p.m. Wednesday on Channel 4.

### THEATRE

**Playmaker Repertory Company**—presents *Once In a Lifetime*, an uproarious comic romp through the early days of Hollywood at 8 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. Tickets are available at the PRC Box Office in Graham Memorial, the Print Shop and Ledbetter-Pickard's. Tickets are \$4.50 on the weeknights and \$4.95 on the weekend.

**Laboratory Theatre**—presents *The Vacation*, a new play by Adam Bergmann at 8 p.m. Tuesday and Wednesday, and 5 p.m. Thursday in 06 Graham Memorial. Tickets are free and are available in front of the business office in Graham Memorial.

**Carolina Readers**—present *To Kill A Mockingbird* at 8 p.m. Wednesday in Bingham 103. Admission is free.

**History of Blacks at UNC**—A narrative artistic presentation will be performed at 7:15 p.m. Thursday in Memorial Hall. Free admission.

### MUSIC

**Hill Hall Tuesday Evening Series**—University Symphony Orchestra with David Serrins as director will perform at 8 p.m. Tuesday in Hill Hall.

**Loudon Wainwright III**—will perform at 7:30 and 10 p.m. Wednesday in Stewart Theatre on the NCSU campus. Tickets are \$2 and are available at the NCSU Student Center, the Union and School Kids Records.

### GALLERY

**Planetarium North Gallery Exhibit**—Watercolors by Nadine Vartainan of Durham will be showing during the month of April. Hours are 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. and 7:30 to 10 p.m. on weekdays; 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and 7:30 to 10 p.m. Saturdays; and 2 to 5 p.m. and 7:30 to 10 p.m. Sundays.

**Photography Exhibit—Hi Ho Silver**, a photography exhibit by Cliff Haac & Richard Lewison, will be showing through May 7 at the art school in Carrboro.

### RADIO

#### WUNC (91.5 FM)

**Today**—At 9 p.m. The Cleveland Orchestra performs the Oberlin Concert, conducted by Matthias Bamert. Works of Mozart and Tchaikovsky will be performed.

**Tuesday**—At 9 p.m. The Philadelphia Orchestra. Dmitri Kitaienko conducts works of Moussorgsky, Shostakovich and Scriabin.

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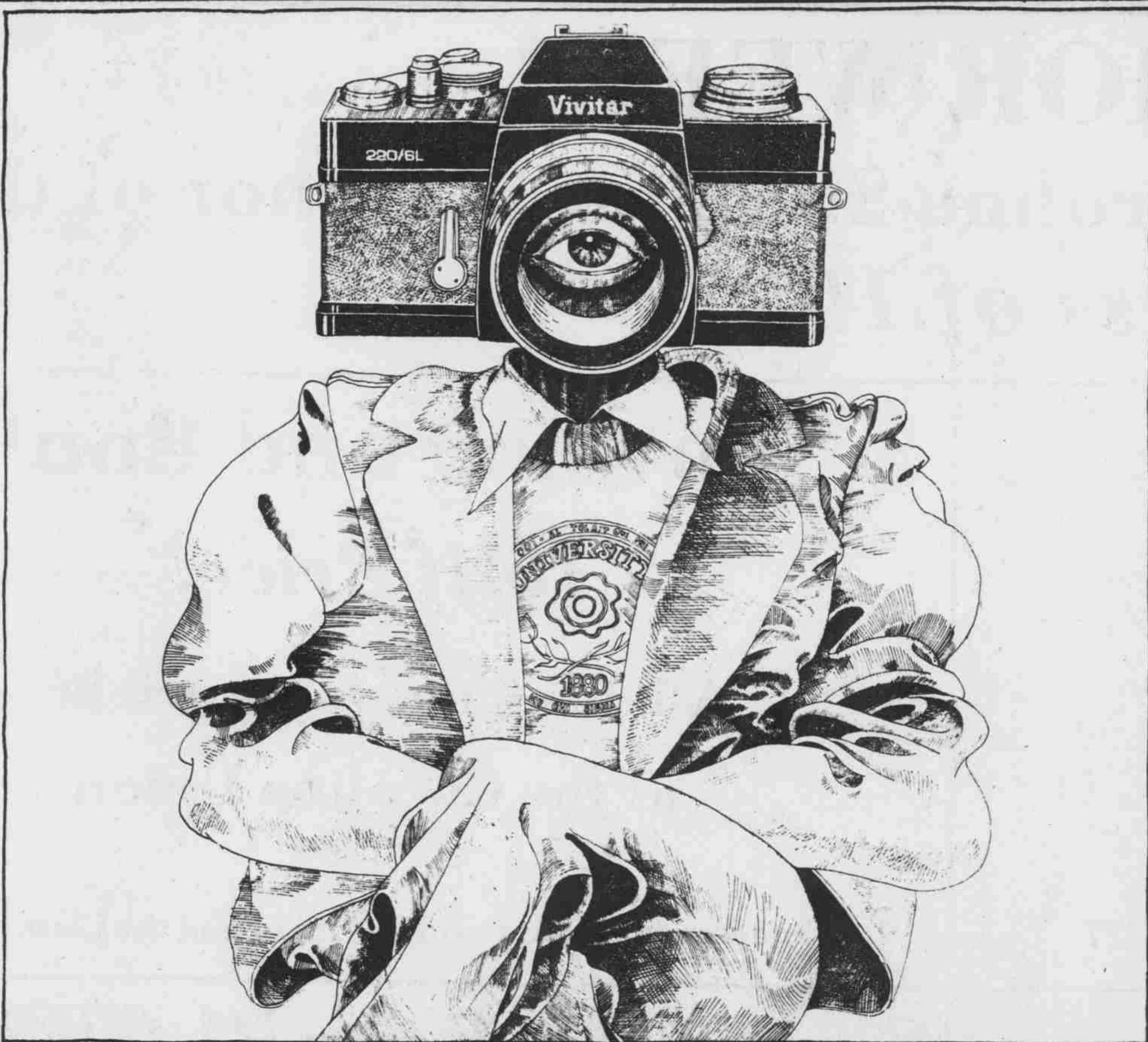
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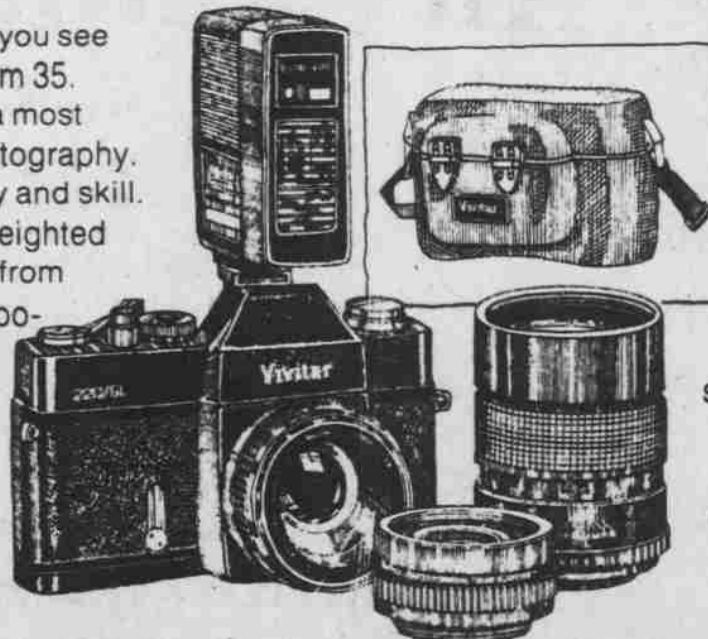
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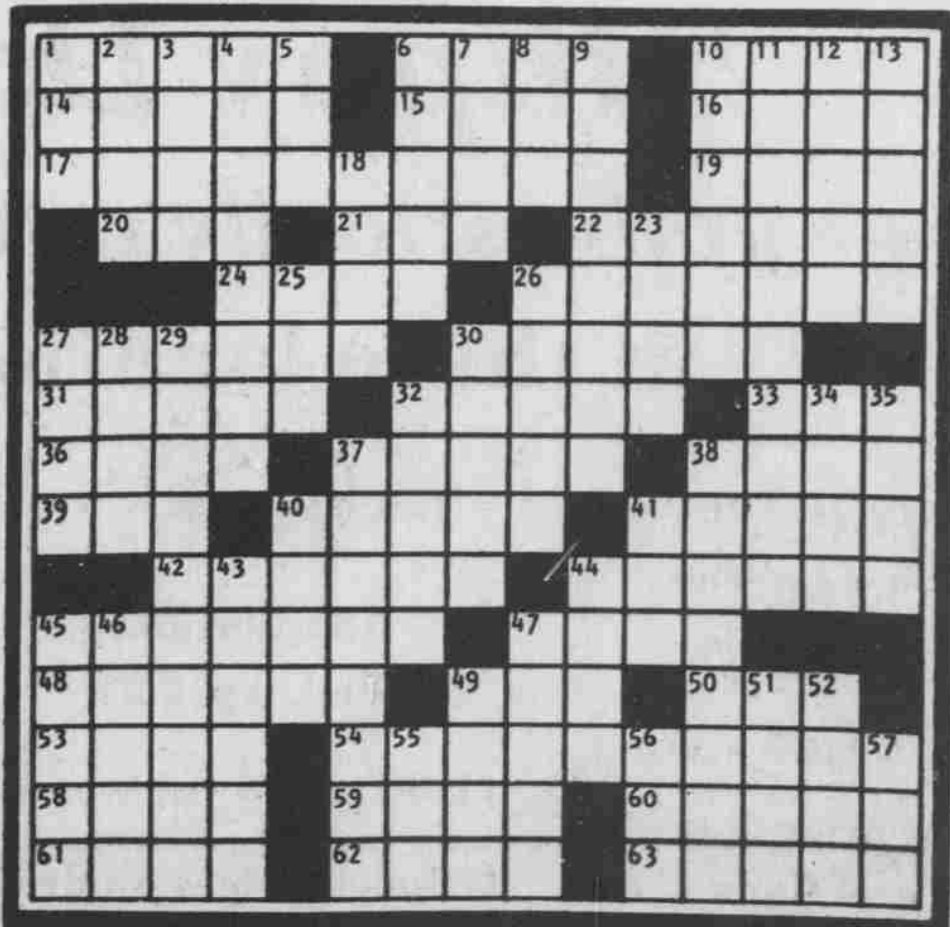
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### THE Daily Crossword by Lois H. Jones

ACROSS	21 Help!	continent	DOWN	28 Artifice
1 Devil	22 Short verse	37 Repair	1 Turf	29 Of unknown cause, as a disease
6 Batty	24 Impetuous ardor	38 No place else	2 Say it's so	30 Like some women
10 Loot	26 Supermarket personnel	39 Old car	3 Hoist a few	32 Mother of Perseus
14 Convex molding	27 Cost fixer	40 One of twelve	4 Baldness	34 — Johnson
15 Indian	30 Coiffure gadget	41 "Marry in —"	5 And not	35 Sugar source
16 Cotton cloth	31 IRS threat	42 Pick up the tab in advance	6 Evil spirit	37 Fop
17 Conduct	32 Tango is one	44 Undergarment	7 War god	38 Hag
19 Butter substitute	33 Seize	45 Cowboy's milieu	8 Half a sawbuck	39 Fish of warm seas
20 Good name: abbr.	36 Good-sized	47 Evening: Fr.	9 Subordinate ruler	41 — polio
Saturday's Puzzle Solved:				
UTAH	CITRUS	ADAM	48 Blabs	43 Stair parts
SEVEN	LAUREL	MEMO	49 — Aviv	44 Soft drink
CARDINALS	EPIC	50 — pinch	53 Pain	45 Blood part: comb. form
LIARS	REBELLS	54 Endanger	54 Endanger	46 Right-hand page
PASSION	MIO	58 Cooking instruction	58 Cooking instruction	47 Flower part
AAL	YUL	SPARTA	59 Diva's song	48 Labor
AUGAE	PLATA	ART	60 Hackneyed	49 Foch of films
SLANDER	AND	LIBEL	61 Soft shoes, for short	52 Moslem call to prayer
HAV	VYATH	EMULAI	62 Holler	55 Before
AVEAVE	ARA	OPR	63 — out	56 Baseball stat.
WPN	TARTS			57 Old times
MOONRAY	OVING			
BURG	UBIQUITOUS			
OWNE	HOCUS	OTTO		
WISE	ROSIE	LAST		



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