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THEATRE COMPANY

MERTON of the MOVIES

A stylized illustration of a person standing next to a camera on a tripod. The person is wearing a tank top and shorts, and is holding the camera up. The camera is mounted on a tripod with a ball head. The illustration is positioned between the words 'of the' and 'MOVIES' in the title.

ROBERT W. DEMARREE, JR., DEAN
DIVISION OF THE ARTS



INDIANA UNIVERSITY
SOUTH BEND

I predict that in 150 years the American
will have vanished and there will be
nothing but Marx Brothers.

George S. Kaufman



As a courtesy to the artists and to other members of the audience, latcomers will be seated at an appropriate time. For the same reasons return to seating following intermission should be prompt. Attendance by children under the age of responsible behavior is discouraged. Audio and video recording equipment and cameras may not be used at a performance in any auditorium of IUSB. Eating and drinking in the Campus Auditorium, Recliner Hall and Uptown are prohibited. Smoking is not permitted in any building of Indiana University South Bend.

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THEATRE COMPANY

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The Theatre Company at IUSB presents

MERTON of the MOVIES

By George S. Kaufman and Marc Connelly

THE CAST

AMOS G. GASHWILER
ELMER HUFF, MR. WALBERG
MERTON GILL
TESSIE KEARNS
CASTING DIRECTOR
J. LESTER MONTAGUE
SIMMOND ROSENBLATT
WELLER
HARRY, THE CAMERAMAN
MAXINE
THE MONTAGUE GIRL
HAROLD PARMALLEE
BEULAH BAXTER
MIRIAL MERCER
JEFF BAIRD
MRS. PATTERSON



Patrick Bannon
Aaron Smathers
Rob Harrington
Kishy Miller
Holly Sante
Rodney Sciba*
Bill Shinabarger
Ron Danno
Jeff Palmer
Elin Green
Mandy Alexander*
Darin A.J. Dahms
Casio Hunter*
Jamie McInturf
Kevin Anthony
Jannie Talboom

* Krappa Koppa, Scholastics
* Krappa Koppa, Scholastics

DIRECTOR'S NOTES:

The mythology that fuels Merton Gill's quest in this play from 1922 is alive and well in 1996. That mythology has deep roots in the brief history of Hollywood. From Hollywood's beginnings in the first decade of this century to the present day the biggest stars have seemingly played themselves in film after film. We seem to readily transfer their heroics on the screen to real life. That has led to the perception that acting is either not work or something that cannot be worked at. Thus, Hollywood stardom is perceived as the biggest lottery jackpot of all—fame, fortune and power.

But acting and theater are work. Work that demands tremendous commitment. As the students involved in all aspects of this production can tell you they have worked extremely hard. Some of them have rehearsed Monday through Friday from 7:00 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. including a few Sundays since August 31, 1996. Rehearsals are rigorous. Rehearsal time is not used for actors to memorize their dialogue. And dialogue must be completely memorized by the third week of rehearsals. Rehearsal time is used to both probe the play as thoroughly as possible and to shape it into a playable and repeatable form that is also entertaining. Other students have been busy in the Costume Shop and Scene Shop over the same six week period. Still others are fulfilling lab hours (requirements in many theater courses) working in the aforementioned shops, working backstage, costume crew, set crew, running sound, lights, the fly-act, etc.

But all of that work must be taken for granted by us who have been "called" to the service of the theater. If we put ourselves on the back for simply spending that time working on the play, quality would not be a concern. Quality is the primary concern. Our time spent in rehearsal and in other production preparations must also be taken for granted by you, the audience. After all, you are here to see, hear and feel the world of this play.

Merton is certainly a dreamer. But he is far more than that. He devises a strategy to prepare him for the rigors of his calling. And it is just that: a calling. Merton has a genuine need to be an actor. But not just any actor. He wants to "do substantial things." What makes Merton different from most dreamers is his tremendous commitment and his solemn dedication to fulfilling his dream. Anybody can dream and everybody does. Merton actually has the courage to struggle to try to make his dreams come true.

Merton lives in Simsbury, Illinois and dreams of starring in silent movies. His solemn dedication to film as a great art make him seem peculiar to those at home and downright hilarious to the professionals in Hollywood. He earns a diploma from a

correspondence-course acting school in Kansas. Acting is one of many skills that cannot be learned in a correspondence-course. However, it is still tried. He also acquires a collection of costumes and a set of "stills" or, as they are called today, head shots. Specifically, Merton's stills are referred to contemporarily as composites. They were used to reveal an actor's range of looks for casting possibilities. Composites are rarely used today. They have been replaced by more subtle photographs that actors use to highlight specific aspects of themselves for specific projects.

Once in California, he lands not a major contract but a one-day job as an extra. He overplays his tiny part and the director fires him, but his faith in himself endures and he takes advantage of a the deserted shooting set to practice a scene.

Luckily, Merton makes a friend on the lot—the Montague Girl, Sarah Nevada Montague, a.k.a. "Flips," an experienced actor who has learned to accept the daily routine of asking the casting director for work. She becomes Merton's guide and confidante, first getting him the extra's job and then persuading director Jeff Baird to hire Merton for a series of comedies in order to exploit his unintentionally parodic imitation of Harold Parmelee, a famous star and one of Merton's heroes. Baird and the Girl fool him into thinking that he'll be making serious films, and all is well until he sees a screening of his first picture.

Merton's Hollywood is a machine run amuck without an off switch. The industry makes the same films again and again, as writers and directors find "new" material not in real life but in movies they have already made.

Except for Flips, the Hollywood regulars are little more than cogs in the machine, never questioning its values or methods. Merton differs in that he will not accept the industry's rejection and refuses to believe that he will not eventually fulfill his dream. Merton persists in spite of all the evidence and maintains his faith in his ideal and in his own success.

This play is based on a Harry Leon Wilson story of the same name published in the *Saturday Evening Post*. MERTON OF THE MOVIES has been filmed twice. Once in 1924 (a silent film) and in 1947 starring beloved Hoosier, Red Skelton. The script of the 1947 film differs significantly from the play.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

George S. KAUFMAN and Eugene O'NEILL

George S. Kaufman was born on 16 November 1889 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He was the only child of German immigrants.

Kaufman was the most popular Broadway playwright of the twenties and thirties. As his career blossomed, Broadway was enjoying the heyday of the twenties, a decade when each season saw an average of over 250 new shows and revivals. Engagements of over 100 performances were noteworthy. A manager might close a failing production confident of finding something new to attract an audience. Hollywood was only beginning to compete for the audience's dollars on a national scale. The prevailing attitude of the time (on Broadway at least) was that Broadway was where real artists worked and Hollywood was for mere crafts people. That, of course, has changed dramatically in the ensuing 70 years.

Critical opinion about Kaufman during his lifetime was divided. Joseph Mersand announced that Kaufman was "generally recognized as the most successful master of stage technique in our contemporary theater...one of our best directors, one of the best writers of dialogue, and...our most capable 'play-doctor.'" Joseph Wood Krutch argued that Kaufman "had turned his back on literary values to achieve the momentary effect...accepting entertainment that was stage worthy but topical and temporary..." Groucho Marx maintained that "when you had Kaufman you had the best." His success is difficult to assail. Eighteen of his plays were featured in the *Bums* Mantle year books, and two of them—OF THEE I SING (1931, with Mollie Hyskind) and YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU (1936, with Moss Hart)—won Pulitzer prizes. Of the thirty-one Kaufman plays that opened on Broadway from 1921 through 1940, sixteen ran for over two hundred performances. Beginning with JUNE MOON (1929 with Ring Lardner), he directed twenty-three of the remaining twenty-seven Broadway shows that he helped to write. However, he did not resign his position in the drama department of the *New York Times* until August 16, 1930. In 1951 Kaufman won a Tony Award for directing *GUYS AND DOLLS*.

The theater was one of Kaufman's favorite topics. In at least sixteen of his plays, the cast lists include actors, directors, playwrights, and producers. He wrote with familiarity about those who devote their lives to the theater. It can be argued whether he was an optimist or pessimist.

Kaufman and Eugene O'Neill best represent the diversity of the Broadway Theater of the Twenties

and thirties. Kaufman and O'Neill were born thirteen months apart and their plays coexisted in New York all through the twenties and thirties. Their styles are as sharply contrasting as the masks of drama; comedy (Kaufman) and tragedy (O'Neill). There are two prevalent and sometimes overlapping canons in American drama: plays that survive in scholarship, and plays that endure on stage. Kaufman's best work falls into the second category; it is performed often but rarely studied. Kaufman was the champion of a theater that affirmed the popular culture rather than challenging it. In a career that spanned forty Broadway seasons, he was involved in over fifty Broadway productions as playwright, director, and actor. Kaufman died in 1961.

Marc Connelly was born in McKeesport, Pennsylvania on 13 December, 1890. He was the only child of second generation Irish immigrants. Connelly attracted attention between 1920 and 1924 as co-author with George S. Kaufman of nine plays and sketches.

While reporting for the *New York Morning Telegraph* Connelly became acquainted with Kaufman who was the drama-section reporter of the *New York Times*. "George, too, had come from Pittsburgh," Connelly reports. "We enjoyed each other's company, and because both of us wanted to be playwrights we were constantly tossing ideas about, hoping to find one exciting enough to justify intensive collaboration." Their first opportunity to collaborate came with producer George Tyler's wish to generate a vehicle for a young English actress named Lynn Fontanne. *DULCY* was a hit. Tyler again turned to Kaufman and Connelly to supply a fresh vehicle for his youngest star, Helen Hayes. *TO THE LADIES* was another hit. While writing their third collaboration, "George and I told ourselves that luck had much to do with the success of *DULCY* and *TO THE LADIES*," Connelly relates. "So we decided not to get too cocky over our talents. On every detail in the new play we would seek the comment and advice of more experienced people and thus minimize the likelihood of error." *THE DEEP TANGLED WILLOWOOD* was a flop.

Both authors established an association with the smart set of New York humorists known as the Algonquin Wits. Regulars of the Algonquin Round Table came to include Dorothy Parker, Alexander Woicoff, Heywood Brown, Franklin P. Adams, Harold Ross, Jane Grant, Harpo Marx, and many others.

About MERTON Connelly says, "For the second time I had found a story in *The Saturday Evening*

About the Authors continued.

Post I wanted to dramatize. It was MERTON OF THE MOVIES by Harry Leon Wilson. It told of a guileless youth to whom movies were the only important thing in life and Hollywood was a holy city. He believed everything he read in the fan magazines and decided to seek a career in Hollywood. Even before we began to work on the adaptation Tyler had signed a young man who proved to be the ideal Merton. He was Glenn Hunter..."

The Kaufman-Connelly partnership ended amicably in 1924. Connelly wrote on his own, between 1925 and 1930, two more comedies, a musical comedy, a series of ten one-act plays, and numerous short stories, including some for the *New Yorker*, which he helped to found.

Connelly became known internationally for the Pulitzer Prize winning 1930 play, *THE GREEN PASTURES*, with an all African-American cast. He went on to write screenplays and directed in Hollywood from 1933 to 1944. In the 1940's he achieved great success in the role of the Stage Manager in the *New York* and *London* productions of Thornton Wilder's *OUR TOWN*. He also directed numerous plays on Broadway. He died in 1980.

ABOUT HOLLYWOOD IN THE 1920'S

The first audience watched a motion picture flicker on a screen in 1895. Toward the end of 1907, the Selig Company of Chicago sent a troupe of players to Los Angeles to complete a film version of *THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO*. Interior sets were built in the rear of Sing Lee's Chinese laundry on Olive Street and exteriors were shot on the beach at Santa Monica. The Selig players then began work on another one-reeler, *THE HEART OF A RACE TROUPE*, which is considered the first "story" film ever made entirely within the Los Angeles area. Hollywood was a sleepy village surrounded by farms and citrus groves--the first lots there had gone on sale just twenty years earlier. In 1908 Selig built a new studio in the Edendale district, east of Hollywood, and the movie makers' invasion of Southern California began in earnest. What brought them to Southern California was the climate, excellent and varied locations, and cheap real estate. Film making came to Hollywood proper in 1911 and soon the word Hollywood was being used colloquially to describe the entire Southern California movie industry.

The comparatively large segment of movie production remaining in the East maintained its position throughout the early feature-film years with the proximity of Broadway plays and players. This situation survived until the winter of 1918-1919, when problems with coal rationing forced nearly all the companies operating in the East to consolidate operations in their West Coast facilities.

The twenties saw the population of Los Angeles expand at an incredible rate. Close to 750,000 people moved there during the decade. The movie colony was a tight-knit group dominated by people in their twenties and thirties. For all its success, though, Hollywood was snubbed by most in the legitimate theater and by polite society. As late as 1931, when the City of Los Angeles celebrated its first 150 years, "The Movies" (movie people) were treated as pariahs. Mary Pickford was the only Hollywood personality invited to the festivities. She refused the invitation.

Highly publicized scandals of the early twenties helped promote the picture of Hollywood as a debauched place devoted to orgies and riotous living. However, it does not appear to have been quite as interesting as the perception that carries on even to the present day.

Film making in the silent era (1915-1928) could hardly be thought of as routine. Few of the people in movies

had much formal education. The tremendous expansion of the industry within a single generation had created employment for thousands, but without a noble tradition there seemed no rational way to master the various professional skills involved. Movie technology is also ever-changing and sometimes even proving. Actors, directors, writers, cutters, cameramen, and lab technicians had acquired their skills on the job by a process of trial and error. They had come on board before the promise of fame and fortune would attract the coming wave of future aspirants. What remained in a particularly primitive and often chaotic state was the most elementary aspect of the film making process: recruitment and training of new personnel for either side of the camera. Organized schooling seems to have had almost no success in preparing young hopefuls for motion-picture work, despite a surprising amount of effort. Columbia University demonstrated a commitment to film studies throughout this period but failed to gain any notable acceptance from the industry.

As it does today, publicity regarding the "effortless" rise of many movie favorites encouraged large numbers of men and women to see themselves as potential screen material. This route was perceived as far easier than age stardom and more accessible to those looking for an "easy" way to film stardom. *Motion Picture Magazine* reported various fakes and frauds directed at these young hopefuls. Many of these "scams" were similar to the correspondence-course Merton took to acquire his acting acumen.

Before the twenties were over, Hollywood had ceased to be the residential center of the movie colony. There had been a gradual drifting west to Beverly Hills, which was a much more exclusive place than Hollywood had ever been.

"Talkies", or sound pictures arrived in 1928. Initially, sound pictures were not taken as a serious threat to silent films. Because they were primarily moving images, American silent films could be and were easily distributed world-wide. While sound pictures also proved to be highly exportable it was not until the 1990's that the American movie dominated world cinema as completely as it had during the Silent Era.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

Gashtler's General Store, Simsbury, Illinois
A Saturday Night

ACT II

Outside the Holden Lot, Hollywood, California
A Monday Afternoon

ACT III

On the Holden Lot
Scene I

On the set of
ROBINSON CRUSOE

There will be one fifteen
minute intermission

Scene II:

On the set of HAZARD'S OF HORTENSE
A week later

ACT IV

Scene I: Jeff (The Buckeye Comedy King)
Baird's Office. A few weeks later.

Scene II: Mrs. Patterson's Rooming House,
Merton's rooming house.

The typical Kaufman fool-farce begins as the fool finds a dream, one that he will follow tenaciously with full belief in its validity, with unquestioning faith in its rewards, and with complete confidence in his ultimate victory. He leaves his home and undertakes a journey to a faraway land full of strangers who do not seem to understand his quest and even block his progress as he attempts to join an institution that is the source of his dream. The body of the play involves the alteration of small triumphs and defeats that take the fool on an emotional roller-coaster ride. He persists and through a combination of others' intervention, his own innocence, and sheer luck, the fool overcomes the obstacles and his dream comes true.



THE PRODUCTION STAFF

Director
Scenic Designer
Costume Designer
Lighting Design
Makeup designer
Technical Direction
Assistant Technical Director
Costume Shop Manager
Stage Manager

Randy Colborn
Thomas C. Miller
Lois K. Carder
Robert S. Kreege II*
Jennifer Marley*
C. Kenneth Cole
Amy Poltras*
Tatjana Longrot
Debra Freeman*

RUNNING CREW

Assistant stage Manager
Properties Coordinator
Sound Engineer
Lightboard operator
Sound Board Operator
Makeup Assistant
Chargeman

Wardrobe Head

Shift Crew

Angela Hains
Becky Arney
Bill Palmer
Marettes Hein
Robert White
Elko Noto
Diane Fisher-Post
Jan Klyver
Cory Penister
Erin Snyder
Chris Campanone
Hal Zoerner

SCENESHOP STAFF

Becky Arney
Bill Palmer
Amy Poltras
Jeff Szymanowski

Cory Delfebaugh
Jeff Palmer
Erin Snyder
Hal Zoerner

COSTUME TECHNICIANS

Natalie Brown
Jennifer Marley
Amy Poltras

Cassandra Malone
Elko Noto
Keith Wolf

Assisted by the students in T120, T349 and T490 classes.

RESIDENT PRODUCTION STAFF

Dr. Thomas C. Miller, Assistant Dean of the Arts
Jamie L. Talboom, Production Coordinator
Chantelle C. Snyder, Graphic Designer
David R. Davenport, Resident Stage Manager

* Kappa Kappa Scholarship
* Broadway Theatre League Scholarship current or former recipient

1996-97 IUSB THEATRE SEASON

The
MERTON OF THE MOVIES
by George S. Kaufman and Marc Connelly
October 1, 12, 17, 18, 19

UNCLE VANYA
by Anton Chekov
Adaption by David Mamet
December 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8,

CHARLOTTE'S WEB
Based on the story by E.B. White.
Dramatized by Joseph Robinette.
March 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23

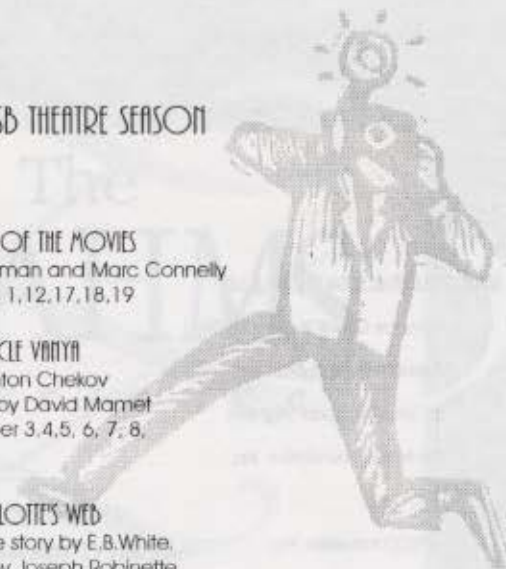
TWO ROOMS
by Lee Blessing
March 11, 13, 16

THE LIVING
by Anthony Clarvoe



Those who wish to offer financial encouragement to the theatre program and to the students for whom it is intended are invited to make contributions to the Theatre IUSB Scholarship Fund.

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