

A star isn't born

Review—Chasin Broadway Flo

A CHNS and Pop Productions presentation at Stages

by Frank McGinn

Chasin Broadway Flo, now playing at Stages, is not that great stage vehicle which makes its star shine bright. Although it tries.

Therefore, it is more singularly difficult to determine whether Lenore Zann is that bright star. Although she tries, too.

If aspirations were only achievement delayed, then play, leading lady and audience would be up, up and away. Book and lyrics by Paul Ledoux, music by Tommy Fair, Chasin Broadway Flo has more climaxes than an average week in the life of Xavier Hollander. It reaches for the sky in a steady stream of tunes intended to stop the show stitched to show-stopping tunes with very, very thin (adjectives insufficient, unsatisfactory, inadequate, short commons, deficient, sparse, meagre, not enough) plot thread. And Lenore Zann, a right trooper, gives the best of her all to each number.

Alas, a lack, there is more to great ability than great ambition. (Let that be its epitaph.) There is talent, and heart, and such. Paul Ledoux is a nothing-to-mediocre lyricist, which immediately takes its toll from our sheer, unadulterated pleasure. I cannot recall any of his particularly bland and fatuous rhymes, but I can remember forgetting them all instantly. And the bits of dialogue sandwiched between songs demonstrated the same careless, leaden touch. So much for the comedy.

On the musical end, Tommy Fair is more compliant. He at least delivers something other than dead air. His score is catchy enough at the time, and vaguely hummable. There

are four or five uptempo chorus numbers that sound pretty decent, if pretty similar, and a couple of outstanding individuals. He writes a very melodious waltz and a rather

fair torch song or two. Probably because he looks sort of like Dutch Mason and sounds sort of like Dutch Mason (he is briefly featured as Buck, Flo Zieffeld's musical director),

Fair sort of reminds me of Dutch Mason. At about half strength.

The problem is that with ho-hum comedy and only amiable, dum-de-dum music, it cannot be said for sure whether Zann is a total so-so or just the victim of a so-so play. Page Fletcher, who takes the romantic lead and provides what passes for plot complications, can be squarely pegged. As an actor, singer and dancer he approaches competence but doesn't quite reach it—he is never quite far enough from it to be outrageously bad and never quite close enough to it to be acceptably good. Like the play, he hovers between the awful and the okay. And Beth Windeler and Pam Cole-Blake-ney, who dance all the extra chorus girl parts, are also non-enigmas. They aren't sharp dancers and they aren't sharp singers, but they are very sharp lookers. Two of the long, slinky type, the kind that come with built-in jade cigarette holders and 18-foot feather boas, they lend a 30's atmosphere to the proceedings and a boost to the evening.



But it is, after all, a production devoted primarily to Lenore Zann, no-town girl and international superstar. Can she or can't she? Is she or isn't she? These are the questions with which the partisan audience is buzzing, and the play has been staged accordingly. Zann is forever in the spotlight, often alone, sometimes sharing it with Fletcher or the two, all-purpose vamps. And, on this evidence, the answers seem to be that she can, but not to that extent, and she isn't, especially. Her voice is pleasant, but her range is limited. She sings her guts out without ever being par-

ticularly chilling or memorable. A strong and dramatic vocal presence she isn't. She can act, but not any better than the next young hopeful. She doesn't dance that well.

Blame it on the extended media hype. (Poor girl, nobody could live up to such grandiose expectations.) Blame it on the material. (Poor girl, Barbra Streisand couldn't redeem this tripe.) Blame it, if you will, on the pettifogging envy of a sour and resentful home crowd. (Poor girl, they were determined to see her fall flat on her kazoo.) I still maintain that I know a star when I see one, and at Chasin Broadway Flo I didn't see one.

Spouses and louses—change of seasons

by Michael McCarthy

"Dickens once said that he had never created a character possessing undesirable traits without having some real person with an even stronger and more repulsive dosage of the same flaws accost him at a party or gathering and say 'Come now, you've never actually met someone like that in real life, have you?'"

There will be similar protestations about *A Change of Seasons*. Since no one likes having their failings revealed as such, there will probably be something in this movie to offend everybody, especially the married couples that might be expected to turn out for a movie about stresses in marriage and the changes in morality which may accompany them.

The first part of the movie almost screams out "Look, I'm phony," with its seemingly cliched dialogue and situations. An aging professor reveals to his wife that he's having an affair with a student. He tosses out ridiculously false-ringing rationalizations and "reasonable" perspectives while she tries to kill him with sarcasm and bitterness. She takes advantages of his next weekend fling by having sex with someone she just met, and eventually all four wind up vacationing in the same house.

If one persists with the excellent acting, it becomes evident that it's not the dialogue, action, and unlikely situation that's phony; it's the people themselves. They are totally morally bankrupt after years of

creating a facade of life instead of living it. They seem unreal because they, and their whole life, are unreal. When forced to take a true look at themselves because of events, they find they are cardboard figures with no direction or foundation. They have to start over and create some philosophy, some real morality to enable them to go on. The latter part of the film deals with the attempt to do this, and how false bravado, and relationships, fall away in the process, leaving bared, vulnerable individuals who can no longer muster the veneer necessary to act like the stereotypes that most people try to become so they can "belong" and "fit in."

Anthony Hopkins wins this week's Rat Bastard of the

Week Award for his portrayal of one of the most self-centred, brutally insensitive hypocrits you will ever have to recognize as not only one of the human race, but a fairly common type of North American male (in the words of his lover, "You're all bastards"). What appears at first to be a stilted, low-key performance proves to be an excellent rendition of a man with no character or compassion, who expects the (female) world to fall all over him in an effort to please, with nothing in return.

Shirley MacLaine gives a tremendously energetic and vital performance as the wife who finds that her husband's affair has freed her to be open and happy outside her marriage, much to the dismay of Hopkins, who wanted to keep her constrained and merely an extension of himself while he found freedom and happiness outside their marriage. His lover (played by the stunningly beautiful Bo Derek, who is required only to be fresh, young, and pretty, which she does well) isn't pleased with his desire to be "shared" by two women, and leaves him to "share" his wife with the lovers she has acquired through following his declared philosophy.

The most memorable portrayal in the film is that of Pete by Michael Brandon. As MacLaine's lover, his warmth, sincerity, and clear-sighted generosity embrace the audience, yet the constant violent, churning menace of a troubled young man lurks constantly below the surface.

While he has much to impart in his accepting, easy-going spirit, he is too afraid of his own emotions to stay in a relationship which starts to force deeper involvement.

The young woman who seems to be so free leaves to find a more permanent, fixed relationship. The easy-going lover has to run from relationships to remain easy-going in them. The man who is so liberal and modern in his views finds that he actually is conservative and antiquated, and by "emancipating" his wife, he has left himself with nothing. Even the new-born wife, who seems to have found a joyful, fuller understanding of how to share feeling and desire, appears in danger of merely changing the old mask of dutiful wife for that of a kick-seeker who is always enjoying herself, when actually she wants something deeper. Nothing is resolved.

No ending, in fact, could be truly satisfying. The married couples want husband and wife to get back together, the feminists want the women to be perfectly happy on their own, the philosophers want a concrete formulation of a plan for relationships...no matter what happened, someone would say "cop-out" or "phony." Perhaps, as Pete says, "The message is...there is no message." Personally I prefer to think that the director wants to force the audience to examine their own situations and realize that it is *they*, not someone else, who must define morality, and that they had better stop play-acting and learn how to navigate the ship, before they have to start swimming.

Oil remember The Formula

by Michael McCarthy

Movie Review: *The Formula*

The world is one big, happy corporation—there are no adversaries, just customers.

This is the way Steve Shagan thinks oil companies see the world, and this movie, based on his book of the same name, powerfully presents his view.

This film is too cynical and too disturbing to be entertaining, but it is a quite interesting mystery movie. George C. Scott gives a forceful performance as a police detective on the trail of a murderer. The eyes are still piercing, the

steely cold smile still deadly as he pounces on his target, who happens to be the head of the American oil industry, played by a fat, but still effective, Marlon Brando. The movie is well paced and finds its main appeal in its suspenseful builds, so one hesitates to reveal too much of the plot. Suffice it to say that goodness and purity succumb to money at a treacherous and unexpected moment.

There is not much more to say about this movie.

One shudders to think of the fate of the world if the men in charge of it (the financial

moguis) are as ruthless and stupid as they are depicted here, but one detects a scent of exploitation of the popular distrust of the corporations (especially oil corporations) currently prevalent.

Nonetheless, it is an interesting concept, and food for thought. The movie is competently acted, and the plot cleverly twisted. If you like good mysteries, come and follow Scott as he sniffs out the blood scent which lures him into a trap which he can't escape, although he thinks he does. When you fight the oil companies, you just can't win.