

NASHVILLE PROUD OF HAVING REAL COMMUNITY STAGE

New Director, Fritz Kleibacker, Building Organization On Solid Foundation —Trains New Talent

By CARL GLICK

NEW YORK, April 3—The opening night last November of the second season of the Community players of Nashville, Tenn., was looked forward to by many people since the first stirrings of activity in August. Not the least of these reasons was the fact that they had a new director, and the rise of the curtain on "Biography" was also the curtain rise of his first Nashville production.

The new director is Fritz Kleibacker—more properly named Fred R. Kleibacker, Jr.—but called "Fritz" by all those who have worked with him. A graduate of Baker's course in drama at Yale, which he took after finishing at Bowdoin college, he wrote the last play that George Pierce Baker produced before his retirement.

Following Yale he spent a winter in Pittsburg directing Little theater productions and teaching an evening course in dramatic production. Spring found him in Hollywood and he spent the summer writing for RKO under Kenneth Macgowan. Since that time he has had a winter at the State university of Iowa on a Rockefeller Fellowship in directing and playwriting, has had advanced courses in lighting and directing, and received his master's degree in dramatic art. Last season he was director of the Community theater of Cedar Rapids, Ia.

Mr Kleibacker is particularly interested in a community form of theater rather than the older, more inbred type. Only by the constant injection of new talent, he feels, can any theatrical organization live and grow, for it is from such organizations that the great names of the theater of tomorrow will spring. He feels, too, that an experimental workshop is an indispensable adjunct in maintaining the life of any community theater organization; as it will serve as a training school in acting, playwriting, directing and designing, and will serve as a source of supply for talent for the major productions of the season.

To No One Group

Because a community theater should be just what the name implies, it cannot maintain a high level of excellence in its productions, or even its very existence, unless it is actively supported by the community it represents. It should "belong" to no one group of people, and no group or individual should be entirely responsible for its courses of action; but every member who is interested in the work of the organization of the theater should have a voice in its policies and a hand in its work.

For this reason the Community playhouse this year organized a working staff, with Mr Kleibacker as coordinator, and every member of the organization was invited to join any committee of the staff organization, make known his ideas and his presence felt.

So there have been competitions for the scenery designing and working hand in hand with the other units of the production staff, this Community playhouse has a well-rounded organization of which it should be well proud.

There was also another innovation. In the past the play committee has chosen the plays with an eye to pleasing the audiences but without consulting those audiences in advance. This year, in furtherance of its general plan and determination to make the community a genuine part of the playhouse the institution has devised a plan for making the subscriber members partners in the function of selecting a part—one-sixth, to be exact—of the season's program. The play reading committee compiled a list of 12 plays from which the last four of the season were to be finally selected. At the opening production each member was asked to vote for his choice of plays, and those which received the largest number of audience votes were those selected to be presented.

"Winterset" Popular

The season got off to a fine start with "Biography" under Mr Kleibacker's direction, and grossed the biggest box office receipts since the inception of the playhouse. About 1100 people saw the play. "Whistling in the Dark" was the second production in December, with the first choice of the audience vote. "Winterset" coming in February. This play proved so popular that an extra performance had to be given, and the box office receipts of the first play were beaten. Exceptionally high critical praise was given the production, being adjudged the finest nonprofessional production ever seen on a Nashville stage. "Goodbye Again" is now in rehearsal, and due for a production soon.

True to its purpose of being a genuine community affair, other dramatic organizations in Nashville are affiliated with the Community playhouse. This includes some 14 groups, both high school dramatic clubs and other producing groups. Among them is a group called "The Stagecrafters" which is 30 years old. This group plans as an anniversary celebration in May to present a play from the period of their first performance 30 years ago this coming May. They'll do it in the costumes and settings of that time.

Another group in Nashville, the Peabody demonstration unit, has been doing original one act plays, written by members of the club, the first being "A Strange Coincidence," by Sarah Frances Askew and the second, "Up in the Clouds," by Anita Grigg.

Interested In Originals

Mr Kleibacker is especially interested in original plays, and is doing all he can to foster their production in Nashville. He was one of the five to receive honorable mention in the nationwide competition of the Bureau of

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