

MAYAN OPENS WITH 'OH KAY'

New Theater Praised as Novelty Dedicated With Play Given Promising Prediction

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BY EDWIN SCHALLERT

With dazzling dashing George Gershwin music, one of the lightest stepping choruses seen hereabouts, and Elsie Janis alluring as a stellar personality, "Oh Kay" provided the requisite means to a scintillant opening of the New Mayan Theater last evening. The production of this New York hit assumed a class both in staging and costuming that is an advance over anything that has been seen here previously, and though there was a share of first-night uncertainty and nervousness on the part of some of the principals in the early part of the performance, it may be safely granted that this exceptionally bright musical show is here for a long and successful run.

Practically speaking, the opening of the Mayan Theater marked the beginning of a new season for stage shows. One has to find the dividing line somewhere, although summer oftentimes seems to be just as good a time as winter for productions hereabouts. Though the actual event of the premiere was somewhat in advance of the fall, it brought forth an audience that has seldom if ever been rivaled, outside of some famous Hollywood dedications.

MAYAN IS NOVELTY

The Mayan Theater casts an agreeable warmth over the spectator. It is abundantly decorative, but the effects are well blended, and typical of an architectural scheme that has never previously been expressed in any playhouse in this locality. It is a building that in its richness and detail elicits a curious as well as a pleased interest, because it is in every sense a novelty.

You will like "Oh Kay." It has a plot that offers unusual variety. Sometimes it is almost a melodrama, with thunder and lightning and shots fired offstage, and the heroine of the piece making a frantic effort to escape pursuing "villains" in the shape of revenue officers, and the hero taking her in and protecting her and hiding her in his own bedroom for the night, politely seeking quarters for himself elsewhere. There is a bootlegging start that is some time later on all forgotten about. The situation switches then to "will the lady have her man or won't she," and there is considerable ado about this, and considerable cleverness when Miss Janis, the lady in question, dons a servant's garb and talks with an English accent.

It is the beauty of the way the dances are done, the rippling Gershwin music, and the comedy of James Donlan that really counts for the triumphal conquests. Donlan will be made overnight here, thanks to his remarkable gift for comedy. You may remember him as the much-worried husband of "The Great Necker," he having been in that show until just recently. It was an adroit bit of judgment that dictated his removal from that production into the new cast, for there isn't a comedy line that he misses, and he keeps the house in an uproar practically all the time that he is on the stage. And that is often.

HUMOR UNLACKING

There is nothing wanting of humor in the book by Guy Bolton and P. G. Wodehouse. They have done a smart one—up to the minute. It uses every device even occasionally down to the pun, but there are so many flashing lines that mirth is constantly rippling over the house in veritable swirls and eddies, and many billowing climaxes of laughter.

What music—that of George Gershwin, and what lyrics those of Ira Gershwin. One might add—what dances those staged by Larry Ceballos, responsible in the Music Box show for the now-celebrated serpentine. Ceballos seems to have caught the real Gershwin spirit—and the tempo is fast and furious.

The tunes themselves? It isn't so much that you remember them individually. But is amazing that after you leave the theater they keep ringing in your ears and urge the impulse to hum or to whistle. The music of "Oh Kay" is the sort that remains with you as a composite. It is almost too swift, too dizzy in its pace to be caught on a first hearing.

IN ROLE OF KAY

And Elsie? What a personality! The role of Kay itself may not be an ideal one for her, but how the audience did applaud her impersonations! Coming toward the close of the performance these proved the major climax. Even though she made them familiar not so many months ago in vaudeville, they are still great entertainment. The audience thrilled to her travesty on John Barrymore, with its recitation of "Yes, We Have No Bananas," to her take-off on Fannie Brice, singing "Do-Do-Do," one of the "Oh, Kay!" numbers; Ethel Barrymore, Beatrice Lillie and others. There were about seven or eight encores—so many, in fact, that with a late start it was nearly midnight before the performance was over.

Of course, there were moments when Miss Janis's powers for characterization did not shine out, and these were the less interesting. Most of these were in the opening act, where especially the number "Maybe," which she did with John Roche, requires too much of voice because of its melodious quality. Here momentarily things looked a little doubtful. Later on she succeeded in characterizing the number "Someone Watch Over Me" very nicely, but Elsie in her work does not obviously suggest romance, and that is something that in spots the part requires. The reception tendered her was tremendous.

CROSBY SCORES HIT

As regards the support, there were some deficiencies here and there. John Roche was decidedly nervous last evening, but his voice held promise, and he succeeded with his portrayal of the rich young man who has various marital vicissitudes. There were moments in his singing when he was off pitch slightly.

A great hit was scored by Jack Crosby—I take it was he—in a dance specialty. Jimmy Clemons was effective in the singing and stepping. The Nelson sisters attracted with their prettiness. There is some clever foot work also by Eileen Marcy, Edith May, Carol Chapelle, Adrienne May. One of these girls incidentally is extraordinarily pretty, and the chorus is altogether one of the cleverest and most attractive here assembled. Bakaleinikoff makes his debut as a music-show conductor locally, while J. Albert King, concert pianist, is among those assisting in the orchestra.

Messrs. Davis, Belasco and Butler have done well in presenting such a sparkling general production, to open their new theater, which is to cultivate the lighter muse, as an adjunct to their already successful playhouse, the Belasco.

Belasco Takes Play Overflow

While first-nighters were jamming the doors of the new Mayan Theater for the dedication Monday night the Belasco Theater next door did the biggest Monday-night business since the play, "The Great Necker," opened eleven weeks ago. The Belasco, incidentally, joined in the festivities with a battery of floodlights.

Inasmuch as the delays incident to dedication occurred at the Mayan, members of the cast of "The Great Necker," including Taylor Holmes, the star, were able to witness the last half-hour of "Oh, Kay!" at the conclusion of their own performance.