

PLAYHOUSE IN BRIGHT DEBUT

New Hollywood Theater
Strikes Popular Note

'Alias the Deacon' Amusing
Attraction

Berton Churchill Has Hit
Characterization

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He's a capital character. That's "The Deacon." And you can see him in "Alias the Deacon," which is being presented at the Hollywood Playhouse.

This is a nifty. Both are in fact—the play and the playhouse, and don't miss the one, or wait until the next production blooms to see the other.

And if somebody should say quite cynically that there "Isn't going to be any next production," what with all the theaters throwing their doors open hereabouts, why give him the steely glance. For this little house in the suburbs, if you want to call Hollywood with its newly acquired Gay White Way the suburbs, is destined from all prospects for a big and popular hit.

That's the way the show game is growing hereabouts and nowadays—and that's the particular and promising individuality of this little institution for the spoken drama, which held its housewarming last evening.

Anyway, the Hollywood Playhouse has arrived, and it is a beauty, what with a grand staircase and a patio, not to speak of an electric lighting equipment that provided a special thrill for those who attended the premiere. Comfortable seats, and luxurious appointments—warmth be-tokened from floor to ceiling—these are among its distinguishing features. Ornateness and intimacy—one can go right on calling forth the words that fit a description. A Spanish motif in the architecture—that's not to be forgotten—nor the two pepper trees in front either. Altogether it is something to visit, and as soon as possible to be up to the minute because it happens to be different.

The Hollywood Playhouse is the second to increase the illumination of Vine street within the past ten days. It is only a block away from the Vine-street Theater. And so this thoroughfare is suddenly acquiring a personality in the realm of entertainment.

An audience quite as brilliant as any at a premiere took part in the festivities of the first presentation. The theater itself is a fulfillment of a community effort, although it does not come in the classification of a community theater, and Ed W. Rowland, as its general manager, acts also as its official sponsor, although there are many other well-known people of the boulevard sector on the directorate.

"Alias the Deacon" is a cheerful affair—very suitable for a first production. It is presented with several past members of the New York presentation, notably with Berton Churchill, who virtually enjoys the starring honors as the deacon. Interest filmwise was contributed by the appearance of Helen Ferguson, who made her stage debut in this play. Helen herself is authority for the fact that she has never appeared heretofore in front of the footlights, which makes the debut unanimous, and, in view of the sentiment of her performance, quite a victory for her. She ought to be glad news to John Golden, since the role is of that type, type perfect, being that of a heroine in much distress because of the man she loves.

"Alias the Deacon," of course, is a genre piece. That's a nice highbrow adjective for a piece which isn't in any sense highbrow. It's the kind of show that anybody can enjoy, who isn't too fantastically particular about a play's message, or its subtleties as entertainment.

Fundamentally, "Alias the Deacon" is good old-fashioned melodrama, with a more or less authentic character study in the bargain.

Nearly everybody will like the Deacon. If it isn't his card-sharpping that appeals, it will be the lift of his eyebrows, and the way he clears his throat, not to speak of the manner, quite his own and thoroughly mischievous, in which he helps people out of their difficulties. He's another of playdom's popular scoundrels, sugar-coated and made likeable.

Mr. Churchill impersonates him with plenty of suavity. His comedy really merits the adjective of unctuous—which is a word today that almost needs a Webster to explain it, because it has been applied so often and so indiscriminately.

In any event, it is clever comedying. Some may call the part actor-proof, but that's hardly in either the cards or the shuffle. The bridge players seemed to get great enjoyment incidentally out of the stage talk pertaining to this, and nearly every game that the Deacon played was good for much amusement.

At the same time, it is really the finer points in Churchill's characterization, of which there are many, that really lend it distinction and explain its popularity.

The first scene was a box car, and this was a unique item. This episode was on the whole very well staged with motion-picture effects. There was some vagueness only to one of the pictorial impressions, while the train was stopping.

As in "Lightnin'," which the play slightly resembles, other developments center in a hotel, and are mainly about how a young couple pursue their way to a "they-lived-happily-ever-after" ending against all sorts of complications and obstacles.

The boy was efficiently done by Walter Emerson of the original company and the girl by Miss Ferguson, whose performance merited much commendation, particularly in the later scenes. Here she was more sure of herself.

There were moments when the cast taken all in all could have entered more genuinely into the spirit of the play, and certain moments also where the stage direction could have been less forced and easier, but the production completely regarded was very praiseworthy. Frances Underwood, who was very acceptable; Jimmy Gullfoyle, Walter Percival, Gloria Gordon, Lillian Hackett, William Turner, young Joseph Depew, Wilbur Hibby and Berdell Jacobs were among the more important players. The piece was directed by A. Leslie Pearce, and it may be mentioned was written by John B. Hymer and Le Roy Clemens, who have undoubtedly hit the popular sort of idea for a comedy-melodrama.

Edwards Davis made a splendid speech of dedication, in which he spoke about the many theaters here as significant of the revival in the spoken drama. He was introduced by Emmett Corrigan.