Even the Carpenter May Play Shakespeare

That's One of the Things Revealed by Sam Hume and His Greek Theater at Berkeley, California

By EARL CHRISTMAS

SAMUEL J. HUME and the Greek theater at Berkeley are institutions in California. One connotes the other. Each holds a vital place in the community and together they provide an interesting commentary in these days when men are reaching out, seeking a means of developing wholesome entertainment in their own cities.

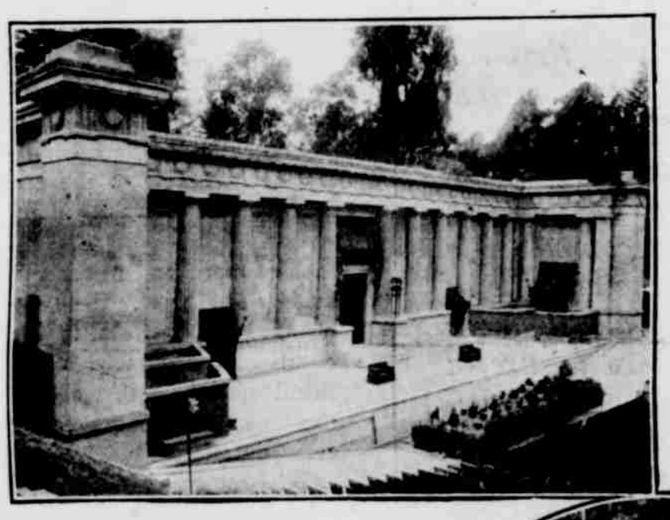
With the growth of the motion picture industry and with unfavorable business conditions recently, the West, indeed the greater part of the country, has found its opportunity to see good plays on the legitimate stage even more restricted than in the past. New York always has dominated the theater in the United States, but just now it has an almost absolute monopoly. To most cities over the country right now, the legitimate theater is a dark house.

So, men and women who are seeking entertainment without dependence on New York, or those who are rankled a little at the commercialism in its products, may find some refreshing moments in a visit to Sam Hume and his Greek theater at the University of California.

Hume holds a unique position. Perhaps no one has done so much to interest communities in better plays. But more significant still, he has been gathering the players for many of his productions from the communities where he worked. He has gone far toward making the community and art assume a vital relation to each other. As director of the Greek theater at the University of California, Hume has a yearly audience of 150,000 persons and takes in box office receipts of some $80,000 a year, though receipts are incidental in this uncommercial theater.

For eight months a year the beautiful outdoor theater at Berkeley is the center of musical or dramatic activity for the community. Incidentally, it is the largest open-air theater in America, and considered by many as the most attractive, sitting something like an architectural jewel in a spot of the greatest natural beauty.

Every Sunday afternoon, there is a free concert, and four or five thousand people gather there to hear the music. Six thousand persons can be seated in the theater, and at university assemblies and other notable occasions several thousand more may crowd in. Plays and musical entertainments are given there for more than half the year, so well is the climate of California adapted to the outdoor play. Indeed, California has gone further than any other section of the world probably in the development of the outdoor play.



Stage of the Greek theater.

But the activities of the Greek theater at the University of California don't stop with the coming of winter. The players just move indoors, and the plays go on.

The activities of Sam Hume and his Greek theater cover a wide range. Recently, in six weeks, he staged three Shakespearean plays, the "First and Second Parts of Henry IV," and "The Merry Wives of Windsor."

"We utilized student aid," Hume explained. "We obtained the best amateur talent in California. We used professionals. We went here and there in search of performers and the result was that we had a blending of amateur and professional talent that would have been hard to excel.

"We had all our costumes made in San Francisco, of fine stuffs, dyed in solid colors. All the costuming, the armor, the furniture—all were true to period.

"The cycle was presented in the Greek theater, and the shows were a great success. That's one thing that we have demonstrated—the people will pay for good shows. The Greek theater is self-supporting. I don't mean that we need to commercialize. If there should be a deficit, the university would assume it. That leaves us free to produce the kind of shows we wish without making concessions to the box office. However, we have found that the plays have paid their own way.

"We do not try to cater to the high-brow. We aim to present just good, normal shows, and we try to keep up our standards. People get so they know what to expect when they come to the Greek theater, and we try not to disappoint them.

"After the Shakespeare plays, we started a series of modern plays, beginning with Wilde's 'The Importance of Being Earnest.' Such big crowds came to see this that we gave a bill of one-act comedies and Ibsen's 'Pillars of Society.' Then we followed with a series of six modern plays, offering such plays as 'The Very Idea,' by William L. Baron; 'If Shakespeare Lived Today,' and 'Fame and the Poet,' by Dunsany, and 'The Thunderbolt,' by Arthur Wing Pinero—plays of that type—and we found them exceedingly well received."

Besides providing entertainment designed to stimulate appreciation of art, Hume is engaged in the interesting task of discovering talent for his plays. For instance, the head carpenter at the university is one of his Shakespearean actors. The wife of a professor is another.

"Our company is made up of students, of residents of Berkeley, of anyone who wishes to work with us and who has inherent dramatic talent," he explained. "We have a lad and his father, a white-mustached middle-aged man. We have a woman who has been with a San Francisco stock company. We have a woman from Illinois who was a school teacher; another from Vancouver—oh, it is a group of cosmopolites without social strata."

But the significant thing is that Hume finds talent in his community to present most acceptable plays. It is interesting here to note, too, that the Greek theater belongs not alone to the University of California. Rather, it is a community institution. The greater part of his support, Mr. Hume explained, comes not from university students, but from residents of the community who come regularly to the theater to see the shows. In other words, the Greek theater at Berkeley has come to fill a vital place in the community.

Hume also teaches play writing, and frequently his students write productions which are presented.

"I have no idea in the world that I can teach play writing," he said. "I even refuse to call the roll. I am only hopeful that someone in the class will be stimulated to think for himself, and express real ideas."

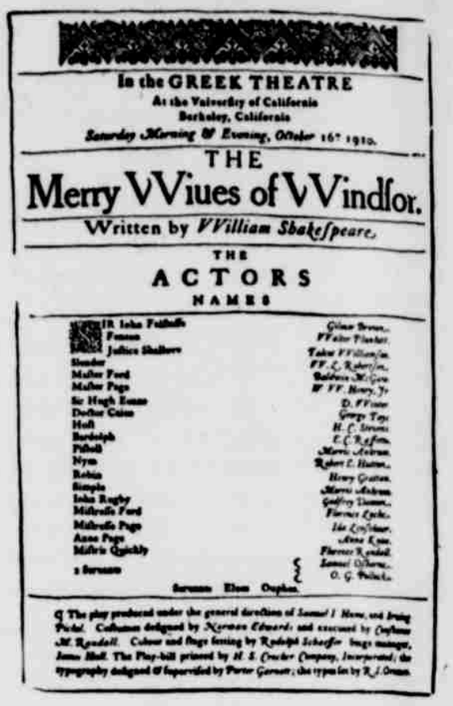
Besides plays, Hume presents concerts and pageants. Last summer he produced the Cranbrook masque at Santa Barbara. Each winter he goes to St. Paul, Minnesota, where he directs an annual Christmas festival.

For the Christmas City festival in St. Paul, he will prepare a play appropriate to the season, assembling all his actors and his choruses and training them in a few weeks. The festival of the Christmas City covers several days and constitutes each year an event of city-wide importance. Signs on the billboards proclaim St. Paul as the Christmas City and enjoin all to recall the spirit of the season. Candles in the windows, which has become a municipal habit with the growth of the institution, emphasize the appeal.

A section of the largest open-air theater in America at the University of California.

Then there is the municipal Christmas festival, and on another day a festival for the children, when 10,000 boys and girls crowd into the auditorium to see Sam Hume's Christmas play.

That's the sort of thing Hume is doing. Often he takes a part in his own plays, turning actor as well as producer. Out in the Greek theater he arranges for symphony concerts. There are art exhibits, too. He gave a show with Ruth St. Dennis that packed the big open-air theater with 7,000 people for each of two performances. The Greek theater has been the scene of some notable productions. Included in the number were the revivals by Margaret Anglin of Sophocles' "Antigone" and "Electra." Maude Adams presented "As You Like It" there, and Sarah Bernhardt produced "Phedre" there. The Greek theater at Berkeley thus serves as a medium for the best actors as well as a means of expression for the amateur.



In the GREEK THEATRE
At the University of California
Berkeley, California
Saturday Morning & Evening, October 16th 1920.

THE
Merry Wiues of Windsor.
Written by William Shakespeare.

THE
ACTORS
NAMES

Sir John Falstaff — Gilmor Brown
Fenton — Walter Fletcher
Justice Shallow — Walter Williams
Slender — W. C. Robertson
Master Ford — Baldwin McGrew
Master Page — W. W. Henry, Jr.
Sir Hugh Evans — D. Wilson
Doctor Caius — George Tyler
Host — H. C. Stevens
Bardolph — E. C. Rafferty
Pistol — Morris Anderson
Nym — Robert L. Hunter
Robin — Henry Gratton
Simple — Morris Anderson
John Rugby — Geoffrey Dawson
Mistress Ford — Florence Lynch
Mistress Page — Ida Crosby
Anne Page — Anne Kane
Mistress Quickly — Florence Kendall
2 Servants — Samuel Osborne, O. G. Pollock

Servants: Elam Stephens

¶ The play produced under the general direction of Samuel J. Hume, and being Period. Costumes designed by Norman Edwards and executed by Stephens. M. Randall. Colour and Stage lighting by Rudolph Schaefer. Stage manager, James Hall. The Play-bill printed by H. S. Crocker Company, Incorporated, the typography designed & supervised by Porter Garnett; the type set by R. J. Orman.

THE DEARBORN INDEPENDENT