

With The First Nighters

"ON TRIAL"

The worth of a new idea successfully exploited through the medium of an analytical mind, a rare knowledge of the technic of the stage and dramatic instinct such as comes to few, is exemplified in "On Trial" the play by young Elmer L. Rizenstein being seen at the Salt Lake theatre this week. It is founded on a simple murder trial and in written backwards, so to speak, beginning with the actual murder and going back in alternate scenes to a time in the youth of the wife of the accused man, leading inversely up to the motive of the crime, involving another in the startling denouement, and from beginning to end holding the audience breathless with interest and suppressed excitement.

Just as with other simple inventions which elicit the mental question, "Why did no one think of that before," the method of unfolding the story causes one to wonder why in all these years in which stagecraft has come to perfection, no one ever thought of doing what Mr. Rizenstein has done. It takes a certain ability to carry out an idea in any phase of life, but the idea is the thing as effectively demonstrated by what has been accomplished with "On Trial."

Soon after the raising of the curtain, the wife of the murdered man is called to the stand, and as she begins her testimony, the stage is darkened and then by a sudden and remarkable change of scene, her story is acted in the flesh, and after the murder is committed, the scene is changed as quickly again. As the curtain descends, the court is shown just as it was when the testimony began. In like manner in the next act, when the little daughter of the defendant begins her story, the scene in his home is shown wherein he draws part of the story of the relations of his unfortunate wife with the murdered man from her; and still further along when his wife testifies, the scene is laid thirteen years previously, showing where she has been tricked by the murdered man when a mere slip of a girl. The novelty of the man being murdered in the beginning and then being shown successively upon previous occasions in his career, is a new order of things in stageland to say the least. It is all very gripping and all very real.

True to their tenets, Cohan and Harris are presenting the play with a company which in every detail closely approaches perfection. With all of the opportunities presented for the numbers to overdraw the characters they represent or to rant in the old fashioned way in places calling for deep emotional work, not one oversteps the bounds and the result is a performance artistic to the last degree.

The care with which these people have been chosen is immediately apparent when the court room is shown at the beginning of the play. The jury is typical of any jury made up of citizens in every day life, for instead of depending upon twelve men whom they might pick up in any town, these have been chosen with a discriminating eye for contrast and the result but adds to the realism of the situation.

Perhaps the most striking personality among the strong men in the cast, is Lee Baker as the defendant who now and then makes a powerful appeal to the court to protect his wife and little one and at other times must remain silent, suppressing his emotions while the state's attorney pillories him when addressing the jury. Douglas Wood (the murdered man) fulfills all of the requirements exacted of him as the contemptible cad portrayed and Charles Riegel as the district attorney and Hal Mordant as the defendant's counsel are strikingly effective.

Of the ladies in the company, Pauline Lord as the wife of the defendant, readily proves that she possesses exceptional ability, the role requiring a display and a suppression of the emotions so quick in their rapid transitions that few could do it justice. Maxine Hodges as the defendant's child gave a remarkable exhibition showing complete understanding of the part and an ability to play it convincingly.

It is scarcely necessary to mention everyone in the cast, suffice to say that it is a pleasure to find a company so evenly balanced.

"On Trial" grows on one, at least that is the expressed opinion of so many that we believe it is general, and if you saw it early in the week, isn't it true that it appeals to you now more than it did immediately after the performance? But there is this about it: once is enough to see it, though it shouldn't be missed.

PANTAGES

"How old did you say you were little girl?"

"I'm just eighteen."

"Ah dearie, that lingerie couldn't get that dirty in eighteen years."

Reminiscent of that little yarn of a lovely lady is "The Haberdashery" heading the bill at Pantages this week, a sketch which serves to show the cleverness of Harrington Reynolds and a lot of other things displayed by a cluster of gals apparently careless and indifferent to the powers of observation of the Johnnies in front.

There is plenty of fun in the act, but it is sandwiched with coarseness and vulgarity and the display of bum underwear is enough to scare a fellow to death. Preceding the procession of knickers and combinations, Princess "Nana" pulls the first real hoochie koochie made in America since the Seeley dinner, and it is some hooch. Evidently the royal household from which Nana hails, does not neglect to see that its children are highly accomplished, and Nana is wiggling her way to glory along lines that put other dancers in the shade and make a monkey of a snake. Nana is dressed in clinging black and spangles and all that stuff, but in spite of the covering, Nana herself is very much in evidence.

The Rondas trio open the bill with the usual bicycle act and are followed by Dow and Dow who pull a burlesque on the sailor boys. It is apparent that their country is not at war, but one wishes that they were at the front. Harry Van Fossen is responsible for some fun in black face, the hit of which is his impromptu speech making and the Rev. Frank W. Gorham, billed as "The Singing Parson" has a fairly good voice but would be better if he ducked the cloth providing he is entitled to wear it. But then he is handicapped a little. A singing parson on a bill with the Princess "Nana" and Pantages pantie parade hasn't much of a chance.

ORPHEUM

Charlie Howard and his inimitable jag accom-

*Nina Payne
with Joe
Niemeyer,
coming to
the Orpheum
tomorrow for
a week's
stay*

