

# Bolger holds audience in palm of his hand

By CORINNE ABATT  
Once in love with Ray Bolger—always in love with Ray Bolger. Any thought to the contrary was immediately erased when the 74-year-old song-and-dance man peeked around the corner of the Birmingham Theater stage Saturday night. The booking was off to a shaky start when ticket sales lagged and the Friday performance was cancelled.

But Bolger fans rallied to almost fill the house for the single performance and welcome him with thundering applause.  
Once on stage he walked down the stairs, up the aisle and took a seat, tipped his rakish hat back and said jauntily, "I thought we were cancelling again tonight."  
No rancor. No anger. He capitalized on the cancellation and happily tucked

## Review

the whole audience into his hip pocket with that impromptu bit of action.  
Consummate entertainer that he is, there was never a moment in the hour and a half that followed that attention wavered.  
Every movement, every word and gesture are worth watching. To miss even one is to miss part of the show.  
The crook of the finger, the flick of the eye, tip of the hat, shake of the hip—all embellish the story whether it is sung, spoken or both together as is Bolger's style.  
AS IF TO return all the love he said

he felt coming from the audience, he put on a marathon performance that would have wilted 90 percent of the dancers half his age.  
He did everything from soft shoe to rock, interspersing the dances with narration and song. He sprinkled in bits of his own philosophy. "Put on a Happy Face," and sang and narrated the "Over the Rainbow" story which ended with his impersonation of the Scarecrow hanging limply from the microphone stand.

Later he traced the development of his own dance style with the song, "And They All Left a Little on the Floor."  
In this he gives credit to the vaude-

ville performers he watched and borrowed from.  
His song and dance, "Once in Love with Amy," from the stage hit "Where's Charley?" complete with audience sing was intended to conclude the show. But there were two encores to answer four standing ovations.

One was a humorous comparison between the politicians of yesterday and today, drawing on his early years in Boston, Mass. for the likes of "Honey Fitz," John F. Kennedy's grandfather.  
The second encore was a spoof of a turn-of-the-century burlesque dancer, Carrie Finell. It came on the heels of an impromptu speech about love and

the importance of a theater like this local one in keeping entertainment alive and intimate.

No one can top Bolger when he goes into his burlesque stink. Like Thurber, Bolger can draw a character on stage that is so pathetically ridiculous that never again would the real one ever dare to appear. His Carrie was clutched, wooden, totally bored and robotlike in the way she flopped her large endowments around the stage.

What a marvelous commentary of yesterday's risqué entertainment.  
Wiping the perspiration from his face, Bolger finally almost ordered the audience out of the theater. The gentle smile, however, was still there and so was the face peeking under the curtain as it was lowered.



## Family film

"All Things Bright and Beautiful" will premiere today at a benefit for homeless animals. The film, sponsored by the Michigan Humane Society, is based on Dr. James Herriot's best-selling novel of the same name. It will be shown at 8 p.m. at the Prudential Town Center in Southfield, with proceeds going for care and shelter of homeless animals. For reservations, call the Michigan Humane Society at 646-6110.

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