



Comedy doubles as Peter Sellers plays dual roles

Anthony Hope's adventure novel of royal intrigue, "Prisoner of Zenda" (PG), easily adapts to a comic mold as Peter Sellers looms about as the heir to the throne and his double. He also appears briefly as the old King Rupert.

The film opens with old King Rupert of Ruritania (not Rupertaria?) aloft in a balloon. As he pops a champagne cork, he punctures the balloon and ends his flight with an uncheduled plunge into a well.

The nasty Duke Michael comments, "He was never a well man." Now young Rupert (Peter Sellers again), Michael's half-brother, will be coming king.

Although the Duke is a scheming, black-hearted villain who'll stop at nothing to gain the throne, Rupert's no bargain either.

He's a weak, frivolous playboy whose main interests are gambling and women. He cares more, he says, about the state of affairs than about the state.

NEVERTHELESS, his loyal subjects are determined to escort him from London, where he does most of his playacting, to Ruritania for his coronation.

To decoy would-be assassins, they engage Sydney (Peter Sellers again, again), a horse and buggy driver who is the king's look-alike, to return to Ruritania with them via a well-publicized route.

From then on, it's a comedy of errors and mistaken identity as the deception continues and the pursuers persist.

"Zenda" is a pleasant diversion, neither as zany nor as physical as the "Panther" series of comedies that Sellers has been occupied with for the last several years. The change of pace is welcome.

As Syd, he plays a sturdy, common-sense type person, at least a dozen cuts above the dense Inspector Clouseau. And even as Rupert, he is a different type of comic character, more foolish than moronic.

"ZENDA," still gives Sellers opportunity to exercise the accents and vocal mimicry at which he excels. Syd's limey dialect is a startling contrast to Rupert's speech affliction; he can't pronounce "a" sounds. Thus when he tries to bribe a guard, he gives him a "woby wing."

Other characters also have their opportunities to shine. Gregory Sierra, as the outraged husband of Elke Sommer (the King's lover) keeps reappearing to challenge the King (Syd) to a duel, only to be thwarted each time in some ignominious way.

It's a running joke that works well, as do other bits of comic business, because the director, Richard Quine, maintains the elements of the film — humor, adventure, romance — in pleasing proportions.

Glimpses

NEW RELEASES

ALIEN (R). Hair-raising, science-fiction horror film about alien life form that terrorizes the crew of a space ship.

BATTLESTAR GALACTICA (PG). Essentially, a drama version of pilot film for TV series but with big sound added.

BOULEVARD NIGHTS (R). Authentic-looking recap about life in the barrio. Set in East Los Angeles.

DAWN OF THE DEAD (Unrated). George Romero's zombies are the ultimate consumers in this gory, satirical sequel to his cult classic "Night of the Living Dead."

THE DEER HUNTER (R). An emotionally gripping and violent film about the lives of three friends from a small steel town as they are affected by the Vietnam war.

THE DREAMER (PG). Bowling version of the "Rocky" story. About as exciting as watching bowling on TV.

THE FIFTH MUSKETEER (PG). Your average swashbuckling tale with heroes, villains and court intrigue. Beau Bridges deftly handles dual role as nasty king and his noble twin.

HAIR (G). The counter culture musical of the '60s, directed by Milos Forman, comes to the screen with amazing vitality and musical energy — if a decade late.

HANOVER STREET (PG). Unbelievably ridiculous World War II love story is short on imagination and long on clichés.

THE LAST EMBRACE (R). Bizarre, tension-filled mystery is stylishly filmed, but burdened with hopelessly complicated plot.

A LITTLE ROMANCE (PG). Two talented young actors, Diane Lane and Tomelino Bernard, in fresh, lighthearted love story set in Paris, Verona and Venice.

LOVE AT FIRST BITE (PG). Dracula goes disco dancing in funny, contemporary version with George Hamilton.

MANHATTAN (R). The inhabitants are somewhat frayed, but the Big Apple looks glorious in Woody Allen's witty peek at the pairings and partings among New York literati.

NORMA RAE (PG). Sally Field is outstanding in contemporary story of union organizing activities in southern textile mills.

PHANTASM (R). Orgy of scares in horror film about mortician who terrorizes two brothers.

THE PRISONER OF ZENDA (PG). Comedy-adventure with Peter Sellers in new version of the Anthony Hope novel of royal intrigue.

THE RAVAGERS (PG). End-of-the-world adventure about survivors on a decimated planet.

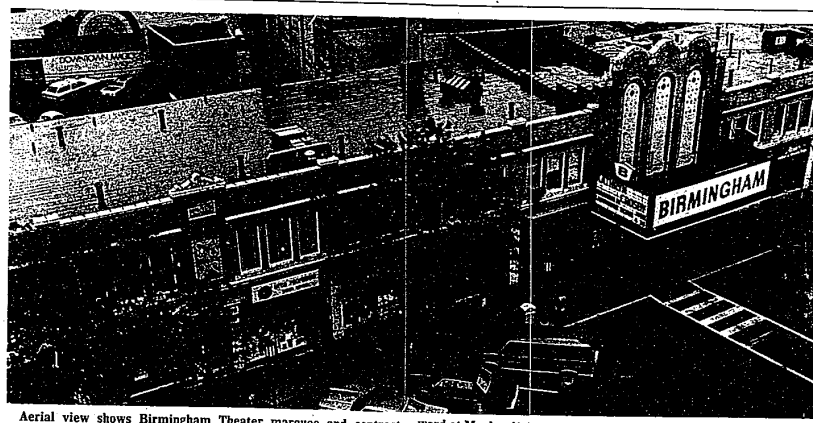
THE SILENT PARTNER (R). Thriller about money and murder with Elliot Gould, Susanah York and Christopher Plummer. Steel yourself for shock ending.

WIFEMISTRESS (R). Erotic film with Marcello Mastroianni as a husband in hiding who watches his wife's sexual awakening.

WINTER KILLS (R). Conspiracy caper about political assassination in entertaining version of Richard Condon's adventure novel.

MOVIE RATING GUIDE

- G General audiences admitted.
- PG Parental Guidance suggested. All ages admitted.
- R Restricted. Adult must accompany person under 18.
- X No one under 18 admitted.



Aerial view shows Birmingham Theater marquee and contrast against arches from original vaudeville theater. Strip along Woodward at Maple adjoins proposed shopping arcade. (Staff photo by Dick Kelley)

'First family' operates theater

By ETHEL SIMMONS

The Birmingham Theater has been touched by the Nederlander magic.

The five Nederlander brothers — four of whom live in the Birmingham-Bloomfield area — comprise the first family of American theatrical enterprises.

At a press conference Tuesday, Birmingham Theater owner and producer Gary P. Deeb and two of the Nederlanders, Harry and Robert, confirmed the business agreement that will turn over the theater's operation to the Nederlander Theatrical Enterprises.

Negotiations are in progress to bring the Tony-award-winning Broadway hit "The Elephant Man" to the Birmingham Theater as the fall season's opening production.

THE ENTIRE NEW season of eight or nine productions will be announced within the next three weeks. Big Broadway shows are promised for all the seasons ahead, by the Nederlanders, who operate 23 theaters throughout the country.

The Nederlanders have acquired a long-term lease on the Birmingham Theater from Central Park Properties, Inc., owner of the "Boardwalk-Park Place" strip on Woodward Avenue in Birmingham.

Gary Deeb and his partners, Ted and Ernest Fuller, already have announced their development of a shopping arcade on the same block as the Birmingham Theater. They also plan to open a French restaurant, Les Colisses, leading directly to and from the theater.

According to Robert Nederlander, the Birmingham Theater "will operate 52 weeks a year." Broadway shows of all types will be brought in, particularly plays or smaller musical productions.

A few concerts may be presented. Shows will include both pre- and post-Broadway runs, and the Birmingham Theater will continue to produce a few shows of its own, which may go on tour.

"WE FEEL a definite need for this kind of theater in the area, in Detroit where we were born and where we live," said Robert Nederlander, who is a lawyer and a Franklin Hills resident.

Harry Nederlander, of Bloomfield Hills, said after Tuesday's press conference that the family has been interested in the Birmingham Theater for a long time.

The brothers' father, the late David Tobias (D.T.) Nederlander, tried to buy the Birmingham Theater 20 years ago, according to Harry Nederlander. "But it was sold to (Bernie) Powell and he leased it to Paramount," he said.



Gary P. Deeb and his partners in Central Park Properties have entered into a business agreement with Nederlander Theatrical Enterprises.

D.T. Nederlander started the family's professional-theater empire back in the late 1930s, when he took over Detroit's Shubert-Lafayette and turned it into the Shubert Theater.

The Nederlander sons all worked in various capacities around the theater. The brothers leased their first theater, Detroit's Fisher (formerly a movie house), which they renovated and reopened in October 1961. The Shubert closed the summer of 1963.

WHEN THE FISHER opened, it was the first new legitimate theater in more than 40 years in the United States. Innovations were connecting dressing rooms between every two dressing rooms, showers installed on the second floor, two leading doors, and a preset lighting rail.

"They produce a lot of their own shows and are more and more into production," said Fisher Theater spokesman Jon Essex. "Their long-range plan is to have a lot of theaters in selling a tour, so they can book a show for the year."

The Nederlanders lease the Fisher Theater and also Pine Knob Music Theater in Clarkston, now in its eighth season. They also own or operate several summer theaters.

In New York, the Palace, the Brooks Atkinson, the Alvin, the Mark Hellinger and the Uris are legitimate theaters run by the Nederlanders. They own the Studebaker in Chicago, lease the Arle Crown, and are opening a third theater there.

Still more theaters are the Palace West in Phoenix, the Fox in San Diego, the Panatages in Los Angeles, the Curran in San Francisco. Others are sum-

mer theaters in Maryland and East St. Louis, Ill., and the outdoor Greek Theater in Los Angeles.

BROTHER JOSEPH Z. Nederlander has just moved into a house in Bloomfield Hills. Fred, who is quietly involved in the theater business, lives in Franklin, James resides in California.

"On the Twentieth Century," starring Rock Hudson and Imogene Coca, is a pre-Broadway show now at the Fisher.

Both "Fiddler on the Roof" and "Hello, Dolly" opened at the Fisher.

The Fisher Theater subscription lists 55,000, for a five-week run. The Birmingham Theater has 3,000 subscribers for its second season of four shows, each with a two-week run.

Gary Deeb said Birmingham Theater subscribers will be given the opportunity to renew their tickets for the new season, with the same seats they have held.

Ticket prices were lowered this season at the Birmingham Theater, evenings from \$5.48-\$12, for its own productions. Harry Nederlander said tickets priced for the new season of Broadway shows will be comparable to the Fisher.

"On the Twentieth Century," for example, a full-fledged musical, is going for \$10-\$17.50 a ticket.

THE NEDERLANDERS attempted a Broadway-type theater for a time at the Vest Pocket (the old Grand River Theater in Detroit) in the 1960s, bringing in off-Broadway successes such as "Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris." The theater opened with the musical hit "Hair."

The Shubert family is "the most important and dominant family in the theater business," said Essex. Comparing

the Nederlanders, he said, "We are very close to them."

However, another individual familiar with the theater business, said, "All the Shuberts are dead. The Shubert brothers are all gone. Their theaters are operated by people outside the family. The Nederlanders are all alive and in the prime of their lives."

Deeb said that Central Park Properties will be the theater's landlord. He said that in the business agreement, Central Park will share in the profits of the theater.

Deeb said that although the theater has realized a profit in its second season, "the Nederlander organization will be able to take it to its full potential."

"It's a tremendous step forward, for not only Birmingham but the entire Oakland County area and the entire State of Michigan."

AN OLD VAUDEVILLE and movie house built in 1927, the Birmingham Theater was completely renovated by Central Park Properties before the first season opened in May 1978.

Robert Nederlander said, "Gary and his associates have done an outstanding job refurbishing this theater. It's a first-class theater."

Replacing the theater seats in the future is the only physical change planned. Harry Nederlander said the theater's present staff will be used, because it is "excellent."

Deeb said that although a request for a liquor license for the theater has been dropped, "We're still pursuing a license for the restaurant. We're very confident a liquor license will be issued. The case is presently in the Court of Appeals. We're also discussing it with the City of Birmingham."

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