

'Lost in Stars' Is a Work of Art; 'Montserrat' a Brutal Melodrama

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Two impressive theatre pieces have come to Broadway over the weekend. Last evening the Playwrights' Company presented, at the Music Box, "Lost in the Stars," a musical adaptation by Maxwell Anderson and Kurt Weill of Alan Paton's novel of South Africa, "Cry, the Beloved Country." On Saturday evening Kermit Bloomgarden and Gilbert Miller presented, at the Fulton, Lillian Hellman's adaptation of Emmanuel Robles' French success, "Montserrat." Once more—as always happens sooner or later—the New York stage has come excitingly to life.

The Playwright's Company has been understandably puzzled as to what to call "Lost in the Stars," for this is a piece which does not fit into an ordinary category. In the program it is called "a Musical Tragedy." After having swallowed the lump in my throat and shaken the last tingle out of my spine, and composed myself for careful statement, I'd call "Lost in the Stars" a work of art.

Here is a production for the musical stage in which all of the complex and cranky elements have been put together in an inspiring manner. A novel has been adapted and has not lost its scope and character as a piece of fiction. Mr. Anderson's libretto and lyrics are the work of an artist. Mr. Weill's music fits the novel, libretto and lyrics like a true and splendid creation, which it is.

The players and singers, some white but mostly Negro, give true and splendid performances, with Todd Duncan being majestically impressive in the leading role of a sweet and troubled Negro Christian minister among the blacks near Johannesburg.

Remarkable Settings.

George Jenkins, the scene designer, has created settings which are arrestingly beautiful and enormously flexible. Against two backdrops, one of Johannesburg and the other of the hill country, the places of Mr. Paton's novel appear and disappear with flawless timing and ease. The city backdrop is one of the most remarkable canvases I have ever seen in a theatre, for it can express many moods under many lights.

And players, singers, story, songs, sets and lights have come together under the direction of Rouben Mamoulian—the Mamoulian who staged "Porgy" and "Porgy and Bess." This time he has not overdirected, as he did with a play last season; he has had enough to

"LOST IN THE STARS"

A musical tragedy based on Alan Paton's novel, "Cry, the Beloved Country." Words by Maxwell Anderson, music by Kurt Weill, settings by George Jenkins, direction by Rouben Mamoulian. Produced by the Playwrights' Company at the Music Box, Oct. 30, 1949.

THE PRINCIPALS:

Leader	Frank Roane
Answerer	Joseph James
Nita	Elayne Richards
Grace Kumalo	Gertrude Jeannette
Stephen Kumalo	Todd Duncan
James Jarvis	Leslie Banks
Edward Jarvis	Judson Rees
Arthur Jarvis	John Morley
John Kumalo	Warren Coleman
Paulus	Charles McRae
William	Roy Allen
Jared	William C. Smith
Alex	Herbert Coleman
Mrs. Mktize	Georgette Harvey
Linda	Sheila Guyse
Johannes Pafuri	Van Prince
Matthew Kumalo	William Greaves
Absalom Kumalo	Julian Mayfield
Rose	Gloria Smith
Irina	Inez Matthews

do to make things come out even. Finally, with an excellent band of musicians under the direction of Maurice Abravanel handling Mr. Weill's beats, plaints and melodies, "Lost in the Stars" becomes a work of theatrical art. It has unity; it seems right—and it has emotional impact.

South African Liliom.

I'll be telling you more when there is more time and space. Enough now to report that the story concerns a black minister in search of his son; his son, a down-under Liliom, is a murderer who is executed. It tells of the sweet gentleness of this religious man and of his unbearable trials; it tells of the misery of the South African natives and of some whites who befriended them.

Mr. Weill's music must be taken as part of the production and not as a set of Tin Pan Alley choruses of 36 bars each. It flows and it talks, but in it should be a hit or two like the title song and one called "Stay Well."

The fine principals also include Leslie Banks, Inez Matthews, Warren Coleman, Julian Mayfield and a remarkable little Negro boy, Herbert Coleman, who lustily sings a remarkable song titled "Big Mole."

This is no song-and-dance show. You'll have to work at it and stay with it to enjoy it—but it will reward you.