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The Play Record

The following record of theatrical productions in New York City during the last five years has been compiled by the *Dramatic Mirror*:

Season	Number of Plays Produced	Number Seen for First Time	Plays Having 50 Performances	Plays Having 100 Performances	Plays Having 200 Performances
1905-06	347	216	44	18	3
1906-07	476	238	44	22	5
1907-08	480	225	41	18	4
1908-09	329	163	27	21	5
1909-10	288	152	46	20	7
Totals	1,920	994	196	99	24

A Season Of Wild-Catting

These figures it must be confessed are rather less misleading than figures usually are. They show very clearly, for example, the rise and fall of prosperity on Broadway since 1905. During the season of 1905-06 the theatres of New York—and of every other American city for that matter—made a great deal of money. The wave of prosperity was at its height: money was plentiful; the public was eager for amusement. The result was a decidedly unhealthy boom. The theatrical managers, enchanted by the clink of cash, began putting up new theatres and putting on new productions in a feverish and wildcat manner. When it became apparent that the supply of new plays would not meet the demand, old ones were resurrected. The figures in the table show the process graphically. The output of new plays in 1906-07 was but 16 more than in 1905-06 or an increase of less than 8 percent, but the total number of plays produced in 1906-07 was 129 more than the number produced in 1905-06 or an increase of 37 percent.

The season of 1907-08 began very prosperously, with fully 300 new productions under way and hundreds of new theatres going up in all parts of the country. Before the cold weather set in there came the panic and in a few months the theatrical business was in chaos. But the managers were not disposed to surrender. Most of them believed that the panic would be short-lived and that the good pickings of the year before would soon delight them again. As a result they hung on. That is to say, they kept their companies and theatres going at a loss in the hope that a turn of the tide would soon make up their deficits. This fatuous courage is revealed in the

table. Though not more than four plays were playing to profitable receipts on Broadway during the winter of 1907-08, no less than 41 were kept on for 50 nights or more, and no less than 18 for 100 nights.

But by the end of the season the Frohmans had learned their lesson, and so during the season following they were more careful. The number of new productions dropped from 480 to 329, a fall of more than 30 percent, and the number of 50-night runs from 41 to 27, a fall of nearly 35 percent. Toward the end of the season the effects of the panic began to wear off, and by the beginning of the season just closed some measure of prosperity had begun to return. But the managers having swallowed a bitter dose were disposed to be extremely wary. There was indeed no return to the reckless adventuring of 1906 and 1907. The table tells the tale. During the season of 1909-10 just closed, but 288 new productions were made in New York, as against 480 in 1907-08, a difference of exactly 40 percent. But, on the other hand, 46 of these productions enjoyed more or less genuine runs of 50 performances each and no less than 7 scored 200 performances.

The totals at the bottom of the table throw a number of interesting sidelights upon the theatrical business in New York City. They show, for example that little more than half of the productions made there each year are of new plays. Again, they show that a new production's chance of running 50 performances is rather less than one in 10 and that its chance of running to 200 performances is exactly one in 80. In five years but 24 plays have run more than 200 nights—an average of less than five a year. In the same period there have been 1,920 productions or an average of 384 a year. Inasmuch as the producing season is not more than 30 weeks long, this shows that 10 or more new productions are seen in New York every week.

Overworked Dramatic Critics

Most of these so-called new productions, of course, do not engage the dramatic critics. Many of them are made at the cheap theatres and others are merely second or third presentations of pieces already seen. But in five years no less than 994 entirely new pieces have been presented in New York and of this number probably 750 have been important enough to warrant newspaper notice. This is an average of 150 a year, or five a week during the 30 weeks' season. Elaborate efforts are made by the managers to avoid a conflict of first nights, but very often it is impossible to do so. On more than one night of the past season, in truth, there were two, or even three, first nights on Broadway, and in consequence every New York dramatic critic now has to have one or more assistants.

No one seems to know how many theatres there are at present in New York. Along Broadway and in the side streets of "The White Way" there are 60 or 70 playhouses of the first class, and scattered here and there about the big town are fully 23 first-class vaudeville houses. In addition, about 25 cheaper theatres are given over to stock companies, melodramas and such stuff. The number of 10 cent moving picture and vaudeville houses, at last account, was about 1,500.

A Season of Gloom

The theatres of Baltimore and other provincial cities reflect trade conditions in New York. During the season of 1906-07 the local playhouses were extraordinarily prosperous, and practically all new plays, however stupid, made money. But toward Christmas 1907 there came a

lamentable falling off and during the rest of that season the Frohmans of Baltimore were far from happy. The season of 1908-09 was frankly appalling. Even the big stars failed to draw. But last fall there came the reaction from the panic, and since then the Baltimore theatres have been doing very well, indeed.

The sudden craze for moving pictures, which struck the country in the late autumn of 1907, was an effect of bad business in the first-class houses, rather than a cause. Moving pictures were not new. The public had been looking at them for five or six years. But when the panic came and it found itself short of money, it turned to them as the cheapest form of amusement available. Had there been no moving pictures, the first-class theatres would have felt the hard times none the less. As it was, the prosperity of the moving-picture parlors merely made more vivid and dramatic the desertion of the \$1 and \$2 houses.

Now that prosperity has begun to return the moving picture craze has begun to die out. The smaller parlors are closing one by one and the larger ones are being converted into cheap vaudeville houses. Two or three years ago the public was content with a few films of pictures so long as the cost of admission was not more than 5 cents, but today it is demanding half a dozen vaudeville acts and is willingly paying 10, 20 or 30 cents to see them.

The Moving-Picture Craze

The rise of these cheap vaudeville houses has done a good deal of damage to so called "polite" or "advanced" vaudeville. But even that damage will probably disappear in a few years. The present tendency, in a word, is toward better shows and higher prices. A number of theatres here in Baltimore which began a few years ago as moving-picture houses with 5 or 10 cents as the price of the best seat are now presenting quite elaborate vaudeville shows and asking as much as 30 cents for good seats. Before long the 50 cent vaudeville house will appear, and after that the 73-cent house. In two or three years, it seems likely, the moving-picture show, pure and simple, will be extinct.

(Source: Parks Library Media Center, Iowa State University, Microfilm Collection)