

the village Voice

a weekly newspaper designed to be read
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The Night People

by JEAN SHEPHERD

That Sort of Night

FROM the moment I saw the crowd lined up outside the Sheridan and winding around the block, just standing there in the sleet and rain, I knew this was a real thing. As I walked along 12th Street across from the movie house, I passed a couple of middle-aged women who were also peering through the wind and rain at the crowd. One said: "They look just like ordinary people." She sounded both scornful and a bit disappointed. Apparently she had heard the kicked-around phrase *Night People*. In a way, I was glad she sounded disappointed.

The crowd itself didn't look particularly cold. They just milled around a little, shuffled occasionally, and talked and talked. It was almost midnight. Almost midnight, and here was a carnival seen through the bottom of a Coke bottle. It was that sort of night.

Began to Go In

They began to move through the doors and into the theatre itself. A large grey-haired man dressed in an usher's uniform looked at the invitations at first, but he gave up after a while and just stood there with a rather silly grin on his face.

In the lobby, more milling, and oddly enough a couple of guys kept popping off flash bulbs. No one knew who they were or why they were taking pictures of nothing in particular.

The crowd kept coming in, wet and still talking. A motley crew. Distinguished-looking couples and beardless youths in blue jeans. Everyone in the throng seemed to be looking at everyone else incredulously. After more than 1600 of them had been seated it was about 12.15 and they were ready. I was watching from the wings, and finally got the signal from a stagehand to go out and say something. The PA roared out a couple of blasts of feedback, the crowd roared back. We were under way.

At first there was a good deal of noise and general confusion as the credits unreeled and as the mob tried to tune out the feelings of gaiety in order to swing with the picture. Finally, comparative silence. As the film moved on, it became obvious that the audience was with it, although the usual movie-house juvenile commentators were with us. This is a breed that is found anywhere a picture of any sort is cast upon a screen. A fact of life.

What to Expect?

Eventually the film ended, but the crowd stayed in place for a few moments and then applauded.

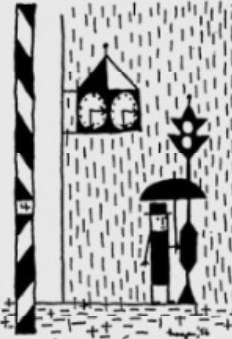
At this point I was backstage, getting signals from the engineer that the air show would start in about 10 minutes. The stage lights went up as soon as I got out on stage with the PA mike as well as the WOR mike. Chairs were put in front of the dead screen for the objects of the question-and-answer period that was about to begin. Before the showing I had talked to the people who were to appear on stage, but none of us knew what to expect, so we were ready for anything. I guess the crowd was too. The star of the picture, John Cassavetes; the director, Martin Ritt; the author, Robert Alan Aurthur; the producer, David Susskind; as well as Jack Warden, a featured player, were introduced to the crowd, which showed varying degrees of enthusiasm for each. The film makers appeared singularly small, just sitting there on the stage. The signal came from the studio and we hit the air.

A Confused Hour

The following hour is very confused in my memory, since I have a recollection of things that started but didn't end, and of many things that ended but didn't seem to start. I seem to recall a short stout

girl asking Martin Ritt about Neo-Realism, but I can't remember what he said in return. There was a tall thin guy who remarked that he was only going to take a moment and then seemed to go on and on about Ideals. There were dozens of others of varying shapes and blases. Some asked good intelligent questions; others merely basked in the light for a moment as though they had been waiting all their lives for this instant in the sun. They are all run together, the way the figures in a Surrealistic painting sometimes melt into the scenery. Like I say, this is my memory of the phenomenon. Personal.

As the questioning went on, the people on the stage became increasingly outspoken and relaxed, as did the questioners, who in turn became bolder and sometimes more inane. It takes a special sort of person to get up on stage before 1600 others and ask questions of movie-makers. There was no shortage of these. One person who watched from the audience told me later that the procession up to the stage had a kind of "Alice in Wonderland"



quality about it, and that he wouldn't have been surprised to have seen Tweedledee in the gang, awaiting his turn.

As for the air show, I have no way of telling how it sounded except to say that several listeners, including Ben Gross of the Daily News, seem to feel that it had some remarkable qualities. This could mean anything. I do know that as I worked I had a sense that this particular deal didn't sound at all similar to anything else I've ever been involved with. All in all, a peculiar evening, and one that anyone who was there won't be able to forget easily.

The picture was "Edge of the City." We all feel you should see it.

the lively arts

by GILBERT SELDES

AS OF this moment, Look magazine has scooped The Village Voice on Jackie Robinson's decision to quit playing baseball. According to some of my fellow-writers, in doing this (quitting or giving the exclusive story to Look, I'm not sure which) Robinson violated the First Amendment and ought to be slowly strangled. What's worse, he got paid for the Look article.

I seem to recall that a few months ago a Cabinet member jogged on to a television news-discussion program and announced an important change in Administration policy. Handed it over to the sponsor, you might say, probably as a favor to Martha Rountree. Laurence Spivak wasn't pleased, I hope, but the Republican Party got returned to power, just the same.

The terrible . . .

IT SEEMS that Mr. Robinson signed a contract two years ago with those crafty Look people, who paid him a lot for his autobiography and added a stipulation—he was to write another installment saying (exclusively!) "I've had it." So when he decided to quit, he kept his word. Shame, huh?

I haven't heard so much virtuous indignation since the late Colonel Robert ("I invented the machine gun and took Bastogne singlehanded") McCormick denounced the Child Labor Act in its application to newsboys as an attack on the Freedom (he used the word) of the Press.

You see, the newspapermen had been doing Mr. Robinson a favor all these years. Printing his name and everything. Not putting "a Negro" after it every time he hit a home run or something. Treated him good, and look what he goes and does! They made him. True he had some talent, but what's talent in baseball without a newspaper buildup?

. . . unfairness . . .

WHAT'S more, Mr. Robinson didn't show proper gratitude to Brooklyn, which, after all, did break the color line. It seemed to me that he had shown a lot of gratitude to Brooklyn, playing as hard as he could and helping the team win a lot of pennants.

It just happens that he had a better job offered to him so he took it and isn't going to play any more for Br—oops, sorry! Says in the paper here it's the Giants he isn't going to play for. How the devil did the man who owed so much gratitude to Brooklyn get to have a duty to play for the Giants?

I get it now. Brooklyn traded him. Didn't want him any more. Fini!

Still, if he had refused to play for Brooklyn, he'd have been an ingrate, wouldn't he? have? been?

. . . of Jackie Robinson

I GET to liking Ted Williams, a Boston player, more and more. He has the worst manners in the world. If he isn't spitting, he makes the gestures of spitting. Grandstand, bleachers, newspapermen, he doesn't care.

Time magazine once had a brief paragraph about the disappearance of the "free-wheeling s. o. b's" from the American scene. I'm for any man who still considers a contract binding and newspaper business the business of newspapermen, ball-playing the business of ball-players—and keep out of my private life, see.

Sick, Sick, Sick by Jules Feiffer

