



**Smithsonian Institution**

*National Museum of African American History and Culture*

## **The Show-Down vol. 1 no. 9**

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"The Green Pastures" --- Sensational  
AUDIENCE ENTRANCED WITH BEAUTY OF FILM  
By Maurice Dancer (Associate Editor)

No production on earth was ever quite so dramatic, so tense, so emotional, so colossal as "The Green Pastures." I was a courageous move and an expensive one on the part of Warner Brothers. They must have been fully aware that the Christian world contains an untold number of quaintly pious folk, who might regard the blasphemy any alien (to them) interpretation, however sympathetic, of the celestial hypothesis, even that conceived by one of the most fundamentally God-abiding people on earth.

Greatly missed in the screen version of the Marc Connelly play, is the suave and dignified manner of the late Richard Berry Harrison, whose portrayal of God for 1657 performances during the run of the stage play, received so much publicity that the words "de lawd" established him in an equally popular vein as that of the title "The Green Pastures." I don't mean to take away from Rex Ingram, but after witnessing his superb performance as the robust "Blacksnake" in the production "Stevedore", you just can not place him as the smooth character of "De Lawd". In the cinema version of "The Green Pastures" he was originally cast for the role of Adam. Rex Ingram speaks with more vigor but no less dignity than his predecessor, doubles ably as Adam and the Prophet Hezrdel.

"The Green Pastures" was first created in the mind of Roark Bradford, whose stories of "Ol' Man Adam in 'His Chillun' ", supplied the manner, mood and dialog. Roark Bradford's connection with "The Green Pastures" has since been overshadowed by that of Marc Connelly, who caused Warner Brothers to go to great expense in filming the play. It was agreed that he should be privileged to utilize all the broad seep of the camera lens in bringing to the screen the elements of the Roark Bradford folk-tale that the limitations of the legitimate stage had previously prevented him from producing.

As everyone knows, "The Green Pastures" is a projection of the dreamy imaginations aroused in the minds of the listeners by an aged preacher telling Old Testament stories to a Sunday school class. One of the strong features of the play was the poverty stricken bareness of the Heaven it portrayed. One of the principal danger of the cinema was that Heaven would either be improve beyond anyone's dream or else that the artfulness of its simplicity might seem condescending. The producers have avoided both these pitfalls. Heaven has been improved, but only slightly.

De Lawd Lookin' Out On His World

[[image: artist's drawing of bearded man and a crowd of worshippers]]

Scenes only mentioned in the original stage production are shown in all their magnificent simplicity in the screen version of "The Green Pastures" so elaborately filmed by Warner Bros.

In it, to be sure, angels cruise on little clouds. From the clouds, they dangle lines for cat-fish. God is still a shabby preacher, calm, elderly



and not too competent. Brash young Gabriel announces him officiously at picnics, has to be sharply cautioned about tooting prematurely on his trumpet. On earth, Cain kills Abel. Moses is frightened by the burning bush and balancing the Ark. In Heaven, female angels dust off the wooden chairs in Jehovah's office. Abraham's grandson rubs liniment on his wings. God supervises these and a thousand more lively happenings.

Hall Johnson's Heavenly choir, in the unique choral arrangement especially adapted for the screen version of the Pulitzer Prize play, moves the audience with its stirring enchantments, until you think the Walls of Jericho are about to tumble around you. The screen version of "The Green Pastures" is a grand job and a masterful screen production.

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