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*Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum Archives*

### Benjamin O. Davis Jr. Collection - Social

Extracted on Apr-18-2024 03:56:40

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[[image - black and white photo of Claudia Cassidy]]  
 [[caption]] CLAUDIA CASSIDY [[/caption]]

and drama reviews for the Chicago Journal of Commerce (1925-1941).

"A brilliant phrasemaker, Miss Cassidy has the ability to make people continue to read her no matter what they think of her notions and opinions," commented Richard B. Gehman in Theatre Arts, July 1951. "She has developed a style wholly her own. It is clear, forceful writing, a beautifully versatile vehicle for her opinions."

Claudia Cassidy was born in the early 1900's in Shawneetown, Illinois, just across the Ohio River from Kentucky. Her father was George Peter Cassidy and her mother, Olive (Grattan) Cassidy. She remembers the showboats on the Ohio River, and with them began her interest in the theatre. Her girlhood was spent in Chicago.

Miss Cassidy attended the University of Illinois in Urbana, where she majored in drama and journalism. She studied music with private teachers. After receiving her bachelor's degree, she obtained a job as secretary on the Chicago Journal of Commerce in 1925. Glenn Griswold, her employer, knowing of her ambition to be a journalist, on one occasion allowed her to write an editorial. She recalls writing on the "coal crisis" and also being sent to Florida to report on a bond issue.

One night she was asked to fill in for Paul Martin, the music and drama critics, who was ill. "To my lasting surprise," she has recalled, "by the happy accident of being handy . . . I was given the job" (Editor & Publisher, March 10, 1951). During the ensuing years she was the drama and music authority on the Journal of Commerce, and became known as the most astute music critic in Chicago.

In late 1941 she went to Marshall Field's new Chicago Daily Sun, to organize the theatre and music department there and to write the criticisms. But she left less than a year later to become music and drama critic for the Chicago Tribune, published by Colonel Robert R. McCormick.

Having lived in Chicago during what is often called its "golden age," the 1920's, Miss Cassidy remembers its fine opera company and theatres, where plays were put together with the same professional care and attention usually given to Broadway productions. In succeeding years, when writers and artists moved to New York, Miss Cassidy remained in Chicago and fought to maintain the high standards in which she believes. Today the revived theatre and opera groups in Chicago are grateful to her; she has helped young and creative groups such as the Playwrights (repertory) Theatre Club and the Lyric (opera) Theatre to gain a foothold.

One of the Cassidy campaigns has been against slipshod or jaded road companies being sent to Chicago with Broadway plays. "Until New York satiates, Chicago starves," was her comment on the Chicago theatre situation in 1948. "In the main," she wrote, "Chicago's theatre consists of New York hits in various stages of repair, brought to us either in duplicate or with what remains of the original company at the end of the



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During Miss Cassidy's campaign to remove a conduct of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Tribune received 200 complaining letters in a week. According to Time (February 5, 1951), she asked to resign, but Colonel McCormick thought that 200 letters to a music department revealed an astonishing number of readers.

Covering three different fields, Claudia Cassidy makes it a matter of personal pride to know her subjects. Over 500 musical and drama reviews testify how the shelves of her office and most of them look worn by regular use. According to Theatre Arts (July 1951), Miss Cassidy is one of the few most perceptive, informed and widely cited in American journalism.

She has been called a perfectionist; others maintain that her long tenure and increasing power in the realm of opinion have given her a sense of infallibility. She has tried, she says, to be a good reporter first, and a critic, second, and to communicate to her readers, by the use of "house words" her impressions. Actors who have received adverse comment in her columns are convinced that she can determine the fate of any show running into Chicago, for the audience shows that a number of plays have floundered at the box office despite her unfavorable criticism.

Occasionally, she has praised the work of an unknown playwright and has urged her readers to go to the theatre to see a "promising play," in which she praised Thornton Wilder's *The Glass Menagerie*, which opened in Chicago on December 30, 1944, and rising for particular approval the actress Laurence Taylor, who was making her comeback. The play's impact in Chicago (where it played for fifteen weeks)

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Occasionally, she has praised the work of an unknown playwright and has urged her readers to go the theatre to see a "promising play," as when she praised Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*, which opened in Chicago on December 26, 1944, and cited for particular approval the actress Laurette Taylor, who was making her comeback. The play's impact in Chicago (where it played for thirteen weeks)

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