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Playbill for Ma Rainey's Black Bottom

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A THEATREGOER'S NOTEBOOK continued

hunger for love and certitude, her addiction to sleeping pills and drink. Having written his first play in nine years, Miller found himself the center of a storm, assailed by charges of bad taste, the quality of his work disputed. (He predicted it would someday be acknowledged as his best play.) In a notable affirmation in the Harvard Crimson, Professor Caldwell Titcomb placed *After the Fall* alongside O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night* and lauded its richness of language.

"Maggie is not in fact Marilyn Monroe," Miller insisted. "Maggie is in the play because she most perfectly exemplifies the self-destructiveness which comes when one views oneself as pure victim. And she most perfectly exemplifies this view because she comes so close to being a pure victim--of parents, of a Puritanical sexual code and of her exploitation as an entertainer." (Maggie is a cabaret singer.)

Directed by Elia Kazan, the play was the first hit (and first production) of the Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center. Jason Robards's Quentin won high approval; Hal Holbrook also played the role opposite Jennifer West. Dianne Wiest, selected after a six-month search, impersonates Maggie at Playhouse 91.

THOSE DANCING FEET

42nd Street is the biggest hit at London's Drury Lane since *My Fair Lady*. "When the audience came in for the opening," says Mark Bramble, who with Michael Stewart wrote the musical, "you already knew it was a hit. The minute the curtain went up they were screaming and cheering and it was a love-in the rest of the night." There were 12 curtain calls.

In the audience were David Merrick, who owns the show, tap-shoes and all, and Ruby Keeler, who reached stardom in the 1933 movie *Forty-Second Street*. "At the end of the performance," Bramble continues, they put a spotlight on her and then on him and the entire audience rose to their feet." Rebounding from a stroke, Merrick "supervised every aspect of the



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London production," Bramble said.

Clare Leach left 42nd Street's fouring company to play Peggy Sawyer, the plucky chorine who replaces a star and herself becomes a star. "We auditioned 150 girls for the part in London," he reports, "but we couldn't find anyone who could do the acting, singing and dancing. Mr. Merrick said, 'Call Clare Leach'--she was at the Shubert in Boston--and she's wonderful."

THE GREAT STYLIST

Truman Capote wrote for the stage *The Grass Harp* and *House of Flowers*, a musical. The play deals with Miss Dolly Talbo's dropsy cure, the tree-house she retreats to and the harp-like sound of the wind in tall, dry grass. "The wind gathers and remembers all our voices," Dolly says, "then sends them talking and telling through the leaves and the fields." Mildred Natwick had this role in 1952.

Among those with her were Alice Pearce as Miss Baby Love Dallas, Georgia Burke, Russell Collins and Sterling Holloway. The play was done as a musical in 1971. *House of Flowers* had Harold Arlen's music and a cast including Diahann Carroll, Pearl Bailey, Juanita Hall and Carmen de Lavallade, in 1954.

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