

Playbill for The Wiz

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[[image drawing of a drinking glass with two play tickets stubs and a swizzle stick in the glass]] Free Cheers!

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wright. As a matter of fact, any two of them would avoid parties to which the third had not been invited, because some wise guy would ask if he was sick or something.

Euripides' most famous play is Medea, the story of a messy divorce. Jason, a middle-aged playboy, wants to leave his wife, Medea, for a younger woman. Medea takes this badly. She murders the other woman. Then, caught up in the spirit of the thing, she kills her own children as well. Medea escapes at the end by flying off in a chariot drawn by dragons.

The Greeks called this kind of ending a deus ex machina, or copout.

Ancient theatre is also noted for its humor. Menander, Plautus and Terence were writers of what has come to be called "New Comedy," a form concerned with manners and domestic problems. Medea, for example, would not qualify as "New Comedy" because while the heroine has domestic problems, she has no manners.

In addition to the "New Comedy" of Menander, Plautus, and Terence (three more playwrights who avoided parties), there was also "Old Comedy" or summer reruns. Unfortunately, this form had a depressing



effect on ticket sales. Finally nobody went to plays at all. For several centuries.

But then the Roman Empire collapsed and primitive Teutonic rites became fashionable. All over the countryside little theatre groups began putting on plays dealing with death and rebirth of the annual wheat crop.

As usual, the actors were unhappy. They complained that playing a stalk of wheat offered little opportunity for character delineation. A Benedictine nun named Hrosvitha tried to help out by writing plays in the style of "New Comedy," or as close as she could get to that style. Her work glorified chastity and martyrdom, however, and so failed to attract a mass audience. Hrosvitha quit the theatre after only six plays, for this reason and because her name was always spelled wrong in the Playbill.

Her departure was a shame because the Church soon entered the theatre in a big way with its Miracle plays, or possibly Mystery plays. Even then no one ever knew which was which. A common joke Continued on page 14

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PLAYBILL dining and entertainment guide

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AM Dance to Ric Belton Trio. Featuring special (showdown) at \$5 for complete supper.

FRANKIE & JOHNNIE--269 W. 45. CUE MAG.--"This Upstairs Restaurant has great steaks, chops, seafood since 1926". Cocktails & Dinner only 4:30-1 AM. Free pkg. From 6 PM. Steps from theatres. D.C., AE, 245-9717, CO 5-9776.

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ENTERTAINMENT

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