

Booked Ahead

Notes on Forthcoming Books

With an eye to finding out what's booked ahead this fall, I hied myself to Los Angeles—for the first time—to the Seventy-third American Booksellers Association Convention. I've been to some fifteen earlier such clambakes, but this was the first one so far from home—usually it's in Washington, sometimes in Boston.

All I can say about Los Angeles is that everything they say about Los Angeles is true. Everything, good and bad: a city of parking lots; a city of angels. A sprawl: I phoned from the Biltmore Hotel, in the city center (if there is such a thing), to a friend whose mailing address is in Los Angeles, and I had to do it through long distance!

Seven thousand booksellers, wholesalers, publishers, authors, and representatives of the press, about a thousand of whom I think I've seen before, were there. But can I connect faces and names? Nix. So I started a list in my notebook of faces and names frequently forgotten. I must nail some of them down for the next time around. The center of activity, and the main sore-feet maker, was the hangarlike Convention Hall, filled with aisle after aisle of display booths. Most of them featured upcoming books, but here and there were to be found a newspaper or magazine looking for advertising, a poster house drumming up business, somebody pushing globes and maps, and the displays of remainder houses who take the mistakes that the publishers make.

The purpose of the convention is not so much to write up orders from the booksellers as to soften them up for the eventual visit of a salesman. There were

giveaways all over the place; you could almost say that the publishers were selling books through buttons and badges. I made a badge-and-novelty-collection tour (with two small boys in mind) and here's what I have spread out before me: a package of alfalfa for sprouting at home (*The Beansprout Book*); a maple leaf lapel pin (Canadian publishers); a balsa-wood unassembled airplane (*The Green Air*) over which one wag exclaimed, "Ah, tongue depressors!"; three blank note pads with suitable advertising covers; a plastic container of candy pills (*The American Connection*, about the "ethical" drug industry); a pencil; a ball-point pen; a live plant (fading fast); some balloons; a package of trading cards with bubble gum; a package of trading cards without bubble gum; postcards pushing Sesame Street by-products; matches pushing Fred Astaire; fudge, gum, chocolates; a Japanese fan with the legend I Am a Tuttle Book Fan; and two guides on how to keep healthy at a convention. And badges, badges, badges. Twenty-five, to be exact. One reads Pepys Is The One, another bears a photo of Frank Costello and the legend Uncle Frank Is Coming. Another has the mysterious message How's Your Avocado (Your *California* Avocado). Paper or plastic shopping bags were urged on you from all sides. Time-Life Books stole a march by handing out cloth book bags bearing the legend, in some foreign language, *Temporis/Vitae/Libri*, and some greedies were seen to have gone back for two or three.

All very well, but what's happening? The trends, the big books? Trend seemed to be non-fiction, particularly spectator-

sports books. In fiction a lot of spy-thriller stuff. Not many really big-name authors. The two biggest (non?) books were Norman Mailer's lavish *Marilyn* and one about the greatest bad-taste maker of all time, *The Art of Walt Disney*. Graham Greene's new novel, *The Honorary Consul*, looked big, and there should be some fun with Ken Kesey's *Garage Sale*. The big "doctor" book was *Ward 402* by Ronald Glasser. And there were dozens of books on needlecraft, on movie nostalgia, on astrology (somebody stole the Pisces pamphlet from a display rack of astrological guides, and the publisher inserted a handmade sign reading Pisces Are Thieves). A couple of funnies were around—like *The Profit* by "Kehlog Albran"—and some crazies like *A Coloring Book of the Iliad and the Odyssey* and a book on how to decorate your blue jeans.

WHAT KIND of thing do you overhear? A salesman going over his list with a buyer: "We're printing 10,000; we're gonna get behind this book. Try one and see what happens." A lady wearing the badge of a health food store: "I've lost six pounds since Sunday; there isn't anything to eat!" One bookseller to another: "They wouldn't think of buying a hard-back. Oh, no, anything more than a dollar-and-a-quarter is out." Same again, "Well, I understand you Coloradians don't want Californians comin' in there." Editor to editor: "We think that's part of the name of the game. . . . Having a dialogue is important."

There were all sorts of ancillary goings-on. Symposia on bookstore management, press conferences with such luminaries as Henry Miller, Christopher Isherwood, Linda Lovelace . . . and parties. Masses of us were bussed to the Universal Studios lot and a barbecue complete with a stunt-men shoot-out to introduce Time-Life's series on the Old West, and to another barbecue at the Beverley Wilshire for the aforementioned *Marilyn*. And, of course, stars were everywhere: Jack Lemmon, Jim Backus, Cesar Romero, and most important, an old hero of mine, Jack Oakie, who kindly sang the lyrics of "The Klopstockian Love Song" from the great *Million-Dollar Legs* to a small circle of admirers.

But enough. In summary, a wintry summary, it will not be an exciting publishing season. There are some pleasing novelties but mostly a lot of non-books and con-books, and hardly any literature. Emphasis will be on the book you buy for a gift rather than the book you buy to read: Thirty-eight thousand four hundred titles a year, but not much to read. Please, this can't be the wave of the future?

WILLIAM COLE



"I like you, Harry. My parents like you. My sister and brother like you. But my guru thinks you're inscrutable."

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private enterprise could do a better job and serve a wider audience spectrum than what was planned for the channel. "I was defeated," he now says philosophically, "by the large foundations." Good as the job that public TV does on occasion, there are still many who remember Landau's Channel 13 as one of television's more glorious achievements.

LANDAU THEN TURNED to film making in earnest. First came *Long Day's Journey*, made for \$400,000, with a cast that includes Katharine Hepburn, Ralph Richardson, Jason Robards, and Dean Stockwell. Next came *The Pawnbroker*, and once more Landau had a fight on his hands. The film, a serious and harshly moving one, was the first to show frontal nudity, in a very brief scene between Rod Steiger and a black prostitute. The Legion of Decency promptly awarded it a C for Condemned rating, and the Motion Picture Association refused to grant the picture its seal of approval. Landau fought the ruling and won a reversal. Before that happened, though, the major distribution companies had turned down the picture, and Landau was forced into distributing it himself. Now a distributor as well as a producer, he acquired several films made by others, among them *The Servant*, *King and Country*, and *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*.

As can be adduced from the above, Landau has come a long way from Peppercorn Chips. Although not exactly a culture vulture, Landau apparently respects—more than that, prefers—dramatic material that has both cerebral and social value. He puts it another way: "I respect the audience."

On the other hand, he is not so respectful of the typical week-in-and-week-out motion picture audience that supports the continuing dosage of violence, sex, and horror provided by the majority of film fare. "Those fourteen million a week are not the ones I hope to attract to my subscription series," he says. "I'm not looking for a mass audience; I'm looking for a very special one. Contrary to the judgment of some of the majors, I think the audience is there and will come out to see a very worthwhile attraction in a theater that is neat and clean, that they will enter with the lights on, and that will provide a program—an appropriate atmosphere, in other words."

To this end he has signed up, at this writing, 512 theaters, in most of the fifty states, that will play the series. Subscription prices will be thirty dollars for the eight enchanted evenings and twenty-four dollars for the matinees. This works out to \$3.75 per filmed play, for evenings, hardly unreasonable for a reserved seat and for shows that, in the case of

The Iceman Cometh at least, will run four hours, with two intermissions. Landau sees as his present task the filling of 1,500,000 seats per play, and his pepped-up organization, led by him and his wife, is hard at work on it. The originally skeptical film trade is now watching the operation with keen interest.

Landau is quick to credit others for the realization of the project. There were several shoals to negotiate, important among them the initial financing of films costing an average of \$750,000 each. He says:

From the beginning, I realized I would need subsidy—not the official kind, which this country doesn't have, but subsidy from financial people, film companies, exhibitors, and, most important of all, the talent. For the major financing, I looked for a non-film-oriented company that had direct-to-consumer marketing expertise.

"It occurred to me that Mondays and Tuesdays were traditionally the worst nights for movie houses. What might I provide? It came to me: good plays, and on film."

The third firm he went to, American Express, bought Landau's idea and enthusiasm almost at once. Landau quotes Howard Clark, chairman of the American Express board, as commenting: "We've all joined in combating pollution of the environment. Perhaps we should join in combating pollution of the spirit." At any rate, a new subsidiary called American Express Films, Inc., is joining with Landau's organization in presenting the series.

Stars of the caliber of those in the play series would have quickly used up the planned budgets and more if they demanded their usual fees. Landau had little trouble convincing them to join in, whether as playwright, director, or star, for no more than \$25,000 each—a relatively low figure for a star of the popularity of Lee Marvin, appearing as Hickey in *The Iceman Cometh*, who has been known to take \$750,000 for his presence in one film. Should the series turn out to be profitable, all will be further rewarded by a suitable percentage.

WHEN AMERICAN Express agreed to participate, a stipulation was made that Landau would use one of the major film companies to distribute the series. As Landau gently puts it, "They wanted the comfort of the association of a major. But so, as it turned out, did my own banks, from which I raised my own and my wife's share of the financing." Landau

entered into an agreement with Columbia to cofinance and distribute, but first there was a knotty problem to be overcome. Did not the selling in advance of eight unseen films amount to a breach of the block-booking prohibition on the film industry? The divorce of production and exhibition came about in 1948 and has been rigidly interpreted by the Justice Department ever since. Back to the lists went Landau, and seventeen months later he obtained a court ruling that permitted him to book his eight films in advance. The ruling specifically allowed the repertory film concept to proceed, on the assumption that it was in the public interest. By the time the court okay came through, Columbia had cooled on the project. With all eight films in production, four in Hollywood and four in England, Landau was faced with the prospect of no theaters to play them in.

Then came what he likes to think of as one of his finest hours, metaphorically speaking. He dashed on an eight-day plane tour of the country, making grasshopperlike jumps to major national theater chains and some important minors, to sell them on his American Film Theatre. "I made impassioned speeches," he said. "I appealed to their conscience, to their half-empty houses on Mondays and Tuesdays, and I came back with a contract from each and every one of them." He also darkly hints at pressure against the plan from interests who opposed turning over one Monday and Tuesday of each month to the non-popcorn crowd.

Landau, who is on the roly-poly side, claims to have once excelled at basketball. It would be hard to envisage Landau driving past a Willis Reed or a Wilt Chamberlain for the basket, and it is almost as hard to envisage the rather gentle and jovial man bulling through a project that required the enlistment of a major corporation, of banks, of theater-chain operators, of the courts, of stars and their agents, and that now requires the mailing of 10 million brochures to that "very special audience" that he hopes will want to subscribe to his series. "If we should die," he speculates a little sadly, "we will have to go the other way." By that he means the typical patterns of general release, with subsequent sale to television. Meanwhile, he sits smiling, beaming even, in his large, quiet office, where MGM used to reign, furnished with white washable plastic-covered sofas, suspended pots holding ferns, and no desk but, instead, a coffee table with only one telephone on it. Buttons on the phone light up frequently, but no buzz or ring is to be heard, merely a gentle, soothing chime. As the trade would say: Whatever happens, Landau and the series have class. □

OPEN SANDWICH, OPEN CITY

by Dena Kaye

On a summer's day Copenhagen's Tivoli Gardens is an earthly fairyland where the streets are garnished with barrels of flowers, soaring fountains, and Japanese lanterns. Here and there one may discover a Moorish palace, a Chinese pagoda, or even a Ferris wheel. Free concerts pepper the air with classical music, moody Italian ballads, and American rock. At the open-air Peacock Theater, pantomimists perform the world's only production of traditional commedia dell'arte, the Italian popular comedy of the sixteenth century that was first presented in Denmark over a century and a half ago. Some thirty restaurants run the scale from fancy French food to simple *smørrebrød*—Danish open-face sandwiches.

The Danes will tell you that Tivoli is an expression of national character. Some say the gardens reflect the allegro and fanciful spirit of a people who revel in life's pleasures more than their sober-minded Scandinavian brothers. Tivoli is a *hyggeligt* place, a Danish word as difficult to translate in one breath as is *gemütlich* in German. *Hyggeligt* refers to a peculiarly Danish sense

of well-being, a visceral and mental comfort that comes when one is with friends and the world's problems evanesce, albeit temporarily.

When Walt Disney visited the Danish magic kingdom, he must have been struck by this quality, for he remarked that Disneyland in California was unique, but it lacked the cozy charm of Tivoli, which comes with age.

"Who else but a Danish king would build an amusement park to take his people's mind off politics?" observed one Copenhagener. It was in this way that Georg Cartensen proposed the plan for the park to King Christian VIII about a hundred and thirty years ago. A writer, diplomat, and architect, among other professions, Cartensen felt that Copenhagen should have an amusement area similar to London's Vauxhall Gardens, a fashionable retreat that, from 1661 to 1859, tempted visitors with concerts, restaurants, and other diversions.

The design was to be cast in the Renaissance mold of the gardens at Tivoli outside Rome, best known for their rampant greenery and profusion of fountains. Copenhagen's park opened in August 1843 as "Tivoli and Vauxhall" (the name Vauxhall was later dropped)

and drew 3165 visitors. Today, about four million people seek its enchantment during the May-to-September season.

Tivoli is a playful, but sacred, outcropping in a city that is the senior port of Scandinavia and the heartbeat of Denmark. The same imagination that once inspired the park now serves pragmatically to preserve traditions and sparks the current efforts to make Copenhagen a more *hyggeligt* place to live in.

Old parts of town are being manicured to maintain the characteristic flavor amid anonymous skyscrapers. Many countries, in fact, are rushing to preserve their centuries-old, man-made environment. Among the most recent efforts are plans for the "European Architectural Heritage Year of 1975." Preliminary discussions were held at a July meeting in Zurich, attended by representatives from thirty nations.

SCANDINAVIAN versions of *le bistro*, that small, intimate eating establishment, set the new style in dining. Exhibitions to nurture Danish design continue to sprout. Shop-lined city streets called pedestrian malls are turning sections of the city into one big sidewalk.

Although Mayor John Lindsay of New York fought two years for a mall on Madison Avenue, only to be defeated, the Strøget, Copenhagen's walking street, has been labeled "Pedestrians Only" for ten years. Strøget is really five different streets linked together (none of them called Strøget) to form a crooked mile. On the occasion of Copenhagen's 800th birthday in 1967, a table stacked with Danish delicacies split the promenade down the middle.

Strøget combines qualities of Fifth Avenue, Bond Street, the Champs Elysées, and New York's Forty-second Street. It is hemmed on both sides with such emporia as Dansk Designs, Georg Jensen Silver, Birger Christensen furs, Illums Bolioghus, a home furnishings store with goods that would tempt one to redo an entire house. There are some who prefer to ignore the notorious pornography shops whose placards advertise Supersex markets. Some of the latest offerings include tape cassettes on a wide variety of spicy subjects.

In the last few years other streets emptying into the Strøget have been converted into pedestrian malls. The lord mayor, Urban Hansen, says the overall plan will eventually free the inner area of the city from traffic. Even Copenhagen's flood of bicyclists aren't allowed. Two-wheelers enjoy such high status as a transport vehicle that bicyclists can get arrested for drunk driving—if, presumably, they can't pedal a straight line.

The Strøget proved such a success that

Strøget—"Combines Fifth Avenue, Champs Elysées, and Forty-second Street."

Danish National Tourist Office

