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Ready, 'MacBird!'

By LEWIS FUNKE

SO far, so good. At least, that was the word at press time from the "MacBird!" general staff. Scheduled to open Wednesday, the play by Barbara Garson — which, in the course of its borrowings from "Macbeth" and other Shakespearean works, implies that the assassination of President Kennedy involved the then Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson — has been giving previews for four weeks at the Village Gate without major incident.

Oh, there was a change of directors, but that was, everyone says, strictly a personal matter. An off-Broadway program publisher *did* refuse to publish the program (for that matter publishers generally shied away from publishing

the play originally — until the author's husband did it himself and sold over 100,000 copies. Now it is under the Grove imprint). A segment of the play *was* to have been offered over WCBS-TV's "Eye on New York," but was withdrawn at the last minute for reasons not clearly explained. The management has tried to take every possible precaution to avoid violations of building and fire department regulations — inspectors recently spent four hours poking around every nook and cranny.

Otherwise, nothing, really. Audiences, composed surprisingly of middle-aged citizens rather than mostly young people as had been expected,

have sat through performances without throwing chairs or rotten eggs. Mrs. Garson, who has been dropping in at the theater, says they've been laughing at the satire and then some have muttered at the end, "Disgusting" — things like that, but no incidents. Mrs. Garson, 25, out of the University of California at Berkeley, is saying that she is not much flustered over all the anticipation of the opening, though some friends suggest she is. In fact, she says, she intends not to be a pacing playwright on opening night. "Of course, I'll be there sitting with my husband," she says. "Anything else would be an insult to the actors."

Actually, Mrs. Garson, a most eloquent young woman, says she never really meant to be a playwright. "MacBird!" she says, was supposed to have been a skit to be presented at one of those West Coast anti-Vietnam protest demonstrations in 1965. "That's the kind of audience I want to write for." But the skit turned into a play — a satire about power, too long for demonstrations. In it Johnson is 'facBird, the tyrant, John Kennedy is Ken O'Dunc, the murdered king. There are also Lady MacBird, the Earl of Warren, the Wayne of Morse and the Egg of Head, who can be identified as the late Adlai Stevenson. Having taken "Macbeth" as the base, the playwright had to include the assassination, though, she says, she wasn't trying to prove anything. "It didn't strike me very forcefully at the time."

Reflecting on the previews

at the Village Gate, Mrs. Garson says, "The funny thing is that the play has become a kind of barometer of public feeling from day to day. Sympathy for Robert Kennedy, for example, has dwindled since the Manchester business."

At present, Mrs. Garson goes up to the Yale School of Drama twice a week for a course in writing for the screen. "But what I really feel confident of," she discloses, "is writing for radio. Radio is underused. With radio you could really organize an audience. What my husband and I have been talking about is an off-shore radio station, say 12 miles off the coast of San Francisco. Oh, it's just talk," she adds quickly, "they'd probably come out and fill us with water." What she will do, she says right now, is go back to Berkeley. "I want to be involved with action groups." Mrs. Garson, a member of the New Left, is a little worried, though, about what her friends are saying. "They say I'll make a lot of money and forget. That's not true, not one bit." *END*