

BROADWAY OPENING

The Big Love

(Plymouth Theater; 1079 seats; \$37.50 top)
 NEW YORK — On her innovative Fox television series, Tracey Ullman showcased a prodigious comic talent, combining the sketch artist's range of characters with the classical actor's ability to disappear into a role. All this she did in two or three varied miniplays each week.

There is a comparable quality to Ullman's performance in "The Big Love," an oversized, sentimental comedy about ill-fated love and its sad, if not tragic, consequences.

Based on a true story, "The Big Love" is a monolog delivered by Florence Aadland (Ullman), whose 15-year-old daughter, Beverly, was Errol Flynn's lover during the final two years of his life.

The coauthor (with Brooke Allen) is Jay Presson Allen, who provided a similar showcase last season for Robert Morse with "Tru," a solo turn in which the actor triumphantly played author Truman Capote.

"The Big Love" is not as successful a work as "Tru," primarily because no matter how much detail Ullman wittingly pumps into Florence Aadland, she is not nearly as interesting or compelling a figure as Capote. Who is?

With her Doris Day wig, turquoise eye shadow and stretchy pastel outfits, Ullman is the picture of a late-'50s middle America still untouched by the Kennedy mystique.

"The Big Love" is set in a Los Angeles bungalow (convincingly, if perhaps too airily, replicated by David Mitchell and lighted to a golden glow by Ken Billington) on the afternoon in 1961 when Aadland is to begin a 60-day jail term for apparently failing to protect her daughter from a deranged rapist.

Packing her few possessions and occasionally distracted by the pop songs coming over the radio, Aadland tells the story of the affair with Flynn from its ugly beginning, shortly after Beverly's 15th birthday ("The day she met Errol, my

baby was a virgin"), to the tabloid media circus that followed Flynn's death and put Beverly in the center ring two years later.

The authors are content to dwell on the surface aspects of the story: Florence chatters on about the Hollywood parties, the trips to Africa, Paris and Jamaica.

Flynn brings the mother into the circle — he's Humbert Humbert to Florence's Charlotte Haze and Beverly's Lolita — and Florence is at

her most humorous describing this circle.

What "The Big Love" lacks is any insight from Florence, and perhaps that's as much a sign of the period as a shortcoming on the authors' part. The affair itself began as a rape, though the next morning, Flynn begged Beverly's forgiveness, and Florence's observation on the point is that "he knew he had got something special."

As a 30-minute television sketch,

"The Big Love" probably would seem brilliant; stretched to an hour and three-quarters, it feels padded.

Nevertheless, Ullman, often compared to Carol Burnett, here turns in a performance that, in its sprightliest and most touching moments, recalls Lucille Ball. During the few, widely scattered moments when Ullman sings (especially her "Prisoner Of Love" performance near the end), she makes "The Big Love" soar. *Remy.*

'Assassins' B'way Hopes Killed

By GREG EVANS

NEW YORK — Weeks of backstage haggling over a Broadway transfer of Stephen Sondheim's "Assassins" bottomed out last week when some of the industry's most influential forces couldn't come to financial terms.

The transfer from off-Broadway's Playwrights Horizons to Broadway would have cost more than \$1 million, according to Michael David of Dodger Prods. Dodger had volunteered to oversee the management of the transfer, and David had organized the negotiations along with Sondheim's agent, Flora Roberts.

Sources say less than half of the \$1 million was raised, despite interest from the Shubert Organization and Geffen Music.

The Jerry Zaks-directed "Assassins," with music and lyrics by Sondheim and book by John Weidman, tells the stories of various presidential assassins and would-be assassins. The offbeat musical opened Jan. 27 at Playwrights Horizons to mostly negative reviews and ended its limited run Feb. 16.

Friction between the Shubert and Geffen camps contributed to the failed negotiations. Insiders say the music mogul balked when Shubert would not match his investment or meet his terms with regard to theater rent. At the last minute, even producer Cameron Mackintosh joined the fray in an unsuccessful attempt at peacemaking.

After several weeks, the potential

backers apparently agreed to disagree. In light of "Assassins'" mixed reviews, the negotiators lacked a commercial incentive.

"No one thought this was going to be the next 'Phantom,'" a source said. One source close to the action said the interested "egos" couldn't agree on "who was going to wear the biggest white hat."

Gerald Schoenfeld, chairman of the Shubert Organization, referred questions to David and Roberts. Roberts did not return phone calls; nor did a spokesman for Geffen.

Despite the Broadway nix, an original cast recording is being made this week and will be released by RCA Victor later this year.

Clarification

The wording of a *Daily Variety* story Feb. 22 about a suit filed by Blake Edwards' Geoffrey Prod. against MGM-Pathe in connection with sequel rights to "The Pink Panther" film series indicated that Edwards' attorney, Sol Rosenthal, "could not explain" why the filmmaker would want to resurrect the series. In fact, Rosenthal did explain, as stated in the article: "He's been wanting to make another one for some time, and it's finally come to a head." Rosenthal told *Daily Variety* later that Edwards "has an excellent project for a sequel that (he) believes would be very successful."

MARCH

MONDAY

4

Touchstone Pictures

DICK TRACY

8:00 P.M.

Todd-AO/ Glen Glenn Studios

WEDNESDAY

6

Touchstone Pictures

PRETTY WOMAN

7:30 P.M.

AMC Century City

SATURDAY

9

Touchstone Pictures

DICK TRACY

8:00 P.M.

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