

# Some Like It Hot, A Reviewer Finds At Chicago Smash

By David Merrick

*The kingpin Broadway producer, whose shows include "Hello, Dolly!," "Marat/Sade" and "Look Back in Anger," got into the Chicago convention on a critic's pass. Although he is an ardent Democrat, you can hardly tell it from his review.*

CHICAGO — What a show! What a wonderful show! The 1968 Democratic National Convention held last week in Chicago's International Amphitheater is an unqualified smash hit. It should run for four years across the Nation and no doubt will hold over for another four years by popular demand.

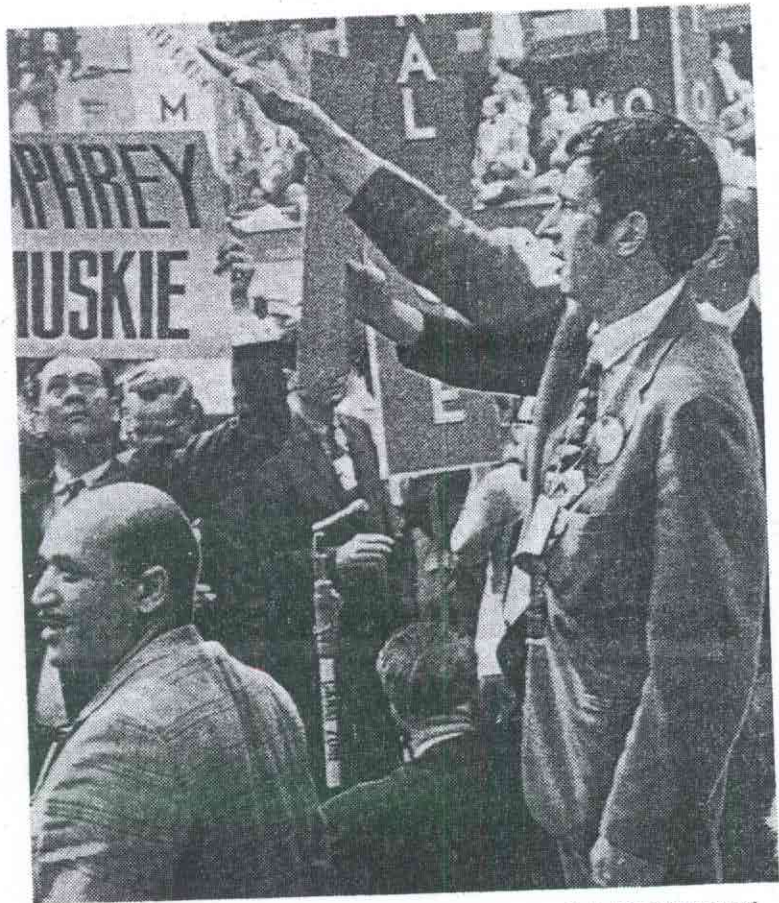
In a romantic and imaginative setting formed by an unusual use of barbed wire by that nonpareil of set designers, Richard Daley, the Democratic Convention provided its audiences with a maximum of drama, humor and brilliant characterizations by an expert and talented cast.

Unlike the Republican Convention, which was based on an original concept by Richard Nixon, the Democratic affair was the collaboration of some of the great American minds of our time. It is difficult to single out any one author for well-earned accolades, since all contributors, too numerous to mention, deserve our praise.

## The Thick of Things

FIRST OF ALL, it was a stroke of genius to hold this convention in Chicago, the nerve center of the United States, rather than a resort in the South far removed from the pulsating heart throb of America. While troupes of rival companies attempted to attract our attention through lurid al fresco performances in the streets of the city, they were minor diversions from the main attraction down at the Stockyards.

As one who recognizes great producing when he is exposed to it, this job was masterful in its color and timing; not one cue went awry. Think of just the brilliant notion of entrepreneur Daley using the Chicago police force in a magnificent display of feigned violence in order to show the Nation how things would be under the administration of Richard Nixon. Think-



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District of Columbia delegate Ralph D. Fertig sardonically salutes Richard Daley as other Democrats cheer the Chicago Mayor.

ing of the months of planning and effort that went into this wonderfully staged production boggles the mind.

The spectators were held spellbound by a series of beautifully written orations building to the most dramatic climax in many a year, and among those spectators I observed a large cross section of citizenry of all races and creed—blacks, whites, Japanese-Americans, clerics and clerks.

The costume design was outstanding. I can pay homage to the plumage of both hawks and doves. The ladies! Ah! The ladies! How they shimmered and sparkled and glowed! Unlike the drab Republican wrens of Miami, the hen Democrats were as radiant as the NBC peacock in mating season. (There is simply no questioning the fact that Democratic girls are prettier than Republican girls.)

### Just Like Wilder

**L**ET ME TELL you about the cast. Starting with Mr. Daley, who displayed an abundance of versatility as both producer and Monday evening soloist, right down to President-elect Hubert Humphrey, who handled the climactic moment, a superb speech, in his polished, professional, confident manner, all were brilliant.

Remember the opening speech by the Stage Manager in Thornton Wilder's "Our Town," in which he described the peaceful village and citizenry of Groves Corner, N.H.? Mr. Daley's heart-warming, sentimental opening speech was just as warmly bucolic in its word imagery of the Second City, of which he is rightfully proud.

One of the fine qualities of the Democratic Convention was its unique

blend of prepared texts and improvisation. Only the most skilled of playwrights and players can bring this off. I could only stand open-mouthed and breathing heavily in the presence of such virtuosity as that of veteran trooper Richard Daley.

What a professional that man is! With what consummate skill, worthy indeed of that other great actor, Booth, he timed his sudden surge of support for Mr. Humphrey after five months of aching suspenseful silence. Henry James never plotted a more brilliant turn of the screw!

### A Happy Ending

**A**LL GOOD SHOWS must have conflict. It is one of the basics of dramaturgy. There was conflict here, expertly controlled and well played by such performers as Eugene McCarthy, George McGovern, Jesse Unruh, Lester Maddox and Julian Bond in the role of antagonists.

But when the time came for the big finale, all were joined in chorus with the protagonists. What better way to leave the theater—or amphitheater—than with a happy, satisfying ending that warmed the audience in a glow of optimism and good feeling.

Listenable music was offered when gospel singer Mahalia Jackson lifted her voice in that soaring hymn, "The Star-Spangled Banner."

I was most impressed by the fact that the action at the convention never lagged. During the Republican Convention, the pace was so pedestrian that most of the audience fell asleep. I have never seen such a well-rested group as the one in Miami Beach. But in Chicago, the audience was galvanized, radioactivated by the dramatic fury that swirled about it.

I was witnessing, after all, the most thrilling of theatrical events: an honest performance. Every character on that stage, including the Cassandra from Connecticut, Mr. Ribicoff, believed ardently in what he was doing and in what he was saying.

I award the convention 50 stars. America has a big new hit today. It should—and will—run and run and run!