

'M'BIRD!' GETS OFF TO FLYING START

It Will 'Open' Tonight After
a Profitable Month

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By DAN SULLIVAN

"MacBird!" flies tonight, at long last, and there is reason to believe that it will be in the air for a while no matter what potshots the critics may take at it.

Barbara Garson's Shakespearean parody of the American political scene is in excellent financial health for an Off Broadway show that hasn't technically opened yet.

More than a month of preview performances at the Village Gate, 160 Bleecker Street, have returned almost half of the \$30,000 it took to get the show on the boards. And the box office yesterday reported a healthy advance sale of \$10,000.

"MacBird!" was supposed to have opened on Feb. 8. When the opening was postponed to tonight, some people whispered that the producers, were ducking the critics.

Fear of Critics Denied

Not so, says David Dretzin, the lawyer who produced the show with Julia Curtis, a former secretary at Random House.

Technical reasons forced the postponement, he said. Mounting the play at the Village Gate, which is more of a cabaret than a theater, posed some problems. Miss Garson wanted to make some changes in the script. The original director, Roy Levine, quit for personal reasons and was replaced by Gerald Freedman, although Mr. Levine's name remains on the program.

Mr. Dretzin will concede that "MacBird!" would have had to open sooner if the previews hadn't drawn as well as they did. He adds: "But if we were frightened of the critics, we wouldn't open at all."

"MacBird\$" is about a country-boy Vice President who arranges the assassination of a golden-boy President, takes power and loses it to the victim's little brother.

Audiences Aren't Shocked

Shocking stuff, if taken seriously—but preview audiences have proved fairly unshockable.

There has been some booing, Mr. Dretzin reported, ("we're not sure at whom"), and one man got up in the middle of a performance and yelled: "Villain!" But most audiences have been "warm and responsive."

At a performance attended by a reporter last week, it was evident that many listeners found the play mild stuff indeed. One young man got up during a question-and-answer session at the end and said, in disgust, that "MacBird!" demonstrated "the utter impotence of the American left."

"Creative man does not shock or entertain the bourgeoisie," he said, just before stalking from the theater. "He kills them."

Writer Disowns Accusation

Miss Garson, who received that statement with an amused smile, told the audience that her play not trying to suggest that President Johnson had anything to do with the assassination of President Kennedy.

Her aim, she said, is to develop her listener's "vague feelings that all of these people [President Johnson, Senator Robert Kennedy, etc] are silly."

To build an effective political movement from these vague feelings is "harder work, less fun," Miss Garson said. But for the moment, she said, quoting a line in her play, "Trouble stirred is always for the good."

"MacBird!" has encountered virtually no harassment from those members of the Establishment it might have been expected to offend, Miss Garson told the crowd. She added:

"That proves either that this really is a free society or that plays like this don't really matter."