

A Corpse Is Revived

MORE ABOUT AUTHORS' COPYRIGHT FEES

(Continued from page 12.)

Where a performance is given by a society, women's institute or similar group, before an audience of its own members not exceeding 25, and in respect of which no charge is made for admission, no fee is payable.

There seems to be little ground for cavilling in these charges. Of course, all performances (including readings) that are not "domestic" or "quasi-domestic" are liable for royalties. Even if no charge is made and only members are admitted a fee is generally, in strict law, payable; but authors, as will have been seen, do give up some of their legal rights in practice, and are by no means unsympathetic or unappreciative of the work done by amateurs in keeping up public interest in their works.

G.B.S.'s Example

IT has been suggested that authors should follow Bernard Shaw's example of charging a percentage of the gross takings. But there are serious and, indeed, insuperable objections to this. First, it gives the author no control over the price of admission, which under such a system it would be most important should be kept at a proper level. Second, there is no satisfactory system of calculating, or of checking, the receipts of an amateur company. Third, the fixed fee enables the author to keep some sort of tag on the quality of performance of his plays.

In calculating on a percentage system it is invariably required (even by Mr. Shaw himself) that an allowance for all members' seats allotted free or at reduced price shall be added to the gross receipts at the full price for which similar seats are available to the public. Amateur societies would do well to calculate how much more they would have to pay, in most cases, under such a system than under the present system. Ten, or even five, per cent. on a gross amount so totalled would often be a handsome sum.

Also, under the suggested system, no allowance would be made for readings or for the use of small halls.

ON this subject, Mr. Cyril Hogg, managing director of French's, thus expressed himself in a recent issue of the "Amateur Theatre": "If a percentage system were adopted, similar to that in operation in the professional theatre, would many societies playing to large audiences be prepared to pay more than £5/5/- (their present maximum), as their return would undoubtedly warrant? I think not.

"The fixed price arrangement ensures that societies know from the outset where they stand financially and can arrange their performances accordingly. It has always worked satisfactorily for our authors and audiences. The great majority of authors understand that it is good business for them and gives them security.

"In addition, it does not lend itself, as the sliding-scale does, to arguments and dissatisfaction over assessments.

The fixed fee is not open to abuse by the unscrupulous as a percentage system is.

"And let me say candidly that a play which comes on the market and which large numbers of amateurs are in agonies in their desires to perform, will always be rated at £5/5/- until the demand for it has waned. Why not?

"In fairness to everybody concerned, especially the author, a success fresh from professional honours must be exploited to the best advantage in the first instance in the amateur market."

IT is not true to state that exorbitant demands are being made which will force the amateur societies out of existence. Extravagant tales about demands for huge sums for past royalties are false.

The only societies which are pressed for payment are the very small minority of recalcitrant societies which carry on as "pirates" in defiance of all legal and moral obligations, and do everything possible to evade payment of the author's just dues.

Only "Pirates" Chased

Authors are determined to stamp out dishonesty of this sort quite ruthlessly. And who can blame them? The use of a play without the author's consent is the exact equivalent of the conversion of another person's motor-car—except that the offence is known by the somewhat gentler word "infringement."

Some people seem to have a very peculiar moral attitude toward plays. Men and women who would not dream of shoplifting or petty thieving are sometimes content to sit on committees and acquiesce calmly in the theft—to give it the only true word—of an author's property. Because that property is peculiarly difficult to protect, then surely it is all the more cowardly to attack. Why steal a play any more than a pound of butter or a motor-car?

Authors and their agents are not hard or unsympathetic. They insist merely on a certain very simple standard of honesty. No society is prosecuted for infringement unless it has committed deliberate infringement or has been deliberately evasive. Most societies in New Zealand have always paid royalties in full and without complaint. Extra fees now payable for readings are very unlikely to affect their financial position to any extent.

There will be no corpse in this Little Theatre "Tragedy in One Act."



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