

Theatre: 'Pleasure of His Company'

Delightful Comedy Is Staged at Longacre

By **BROOKS ATKINSON**

THANKS to everyone concerned, "The Pleasure of His Company," acted at the Longacre last evening, turns out to be thoroughly delightful.

Those concerned are Samuel Taylor, who wrote the play "with (Cornelia Otis Skinner)," as the program bills it with tiresome exactitude. But "The Pleasure of His Company" is the sort of gay and silken comedy of manners that puts everyone at ease on and off the stage. Those to whom thanks are due include everyone in the cast, and particularly Cyril Ritchard, who has staged it perfectly.

Like a legitimate comedy of manners, "The Pleasure of His Company" begins with an Oriental houseboy (probably Chinese, though one must be cautious) opening wedding presents for Missy. But the authors do better than that almost immediately. Jessica Poole, a San Francisco beauty, is about to marry an attractive young man whose father owns a notable ranch. Jessica and her fiancé expect to settle down to child and cattle-breeding.

Jessica has been politely reared by her mother and stepfather. Her real father is a celebrated world traveler, playboy and sybarite. He flies from Africa for the wedding. "The Pleasure of His Company" is concerned with the unsettling excitement of his presence.

He flirts with his daughter, as he instinctively flirts with every woman. He makes Jessica's fiancé look dull and boorish by contrast. He makes her present life look stupid and her future life



Cyril Ritchard and Cornelia Otis Skinner appearing in a scene from "The Pleasure of His Company."

The Cast

THE PLEASURE OF HIS COMPANY, a comedy by Samuel Taylor (with Cornelia Otis Skinner). Staged by Cyril Ritchard; scenery and lighting by Donald Oenslager; costumes by Edith Head; presented by Frederick Brisson and the Playwrights Company; production assistant, Edward H. Davis; production stage manager, Fred Hebert. At the Longacre Theatre.

Toy: Jerry Fujikawa

—suave and mobile, dry and Sphinx-like, mocking in the style of speaking. He plays a cad who has charm and plausibility.

In the best part she has acted for years, Miss Skinner gives her best performance as

Richard, who has staged it perfectly.

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He flirts with his daughter, as he instinctively flirts with every woman. He makes Jessica's fiancé look dull and boorish by contrast. He makes her present life look stupid and her future life look deadly. An egotist, romantic, scoundrel and brilliant talker, he is the Pied Piper of exotic places far away.

"The Pleasure of His Company" has a depressing tendency to be wholesome toward the end. Probably there is no completely satisfactory ending, and the authors are merely taking the humane way out. But the ending is gay, which is all that really matters, and the play is amusing and civilized all the way through.

All the characters have manners and intelligence, and most of them have a sense of humor. They could hardly fail in that respect. For the authors write light, ironic dialogue with polish and skill, and manage now and then to quote poets and philosophers without sounding pretentious. It is a long time since the English language has been



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Toy Jerry Fujikawa
Biddeford Poole Cyril Ritchard
Jessica Poole Dolores Hart
Katherine Dougherty
Cornelia Otis Skinner
Jim Dougherty Walter Abel
Mackenzie Savage Charlie Ruggles
Roger Henderson George Peppard

used with so much dexterity by writers interested in nothing more lethal than a good time.

It is the tradition to produce comedies of manners with elegance. In this instance, the tradition is scrupulously observed. Designing a San Francisco drawing room with careless opulence, Donald Oenslager has made luxury seem like the most natural thing in the world.

Despite the rule that no one can direct a play in which he acts the leading part, Mr. Ritchard is impeccable in both respects. The group performance has grace, design and a skimming touch. In the part of the aberrant father, Mr. Ritchard is in great form

—suave and mobile, dry and Sphinx-like, mocking in the style of speaking. He plays a cad who has charm and plausibility.

In the best part she has acted for years, Miss Skinner gives her best performance, as a bluestocking who knows the difference between a fraud and a gentleman. Charlie Ruggles, who has been absent too many years, is wonderfully droll and casual as a grandfather full of good quotations. Walter Abel represents sound thinking and responsible good humor as a stepfather who finds himself becoming superfluous.

Dolores Hart, a fresh young actress with a magnetic personality, is excellent as the mercurial Jessica, who covers a wide range from girlish excitement to alarm and rage. As her suitor, out-classed by her brilliant father, George Peppard is admirable also. Like everyone else in the cast, he makes a real character out of the authors' giddy attitudes.

Comedy of manners is not obsolete after all. "The Pleasure of His Company" gives pleasure on both sides of the footlights.