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8 August 1974

'No, No, Nanette'— Strong Music, Insipid Plot

By WALTER LAZENBY

SULLIVAN—"No, No, Nanette," the recently revived musical now appearing here, must have been old-fashioned when it was first introduced.

Though set in the Twenties, the musical presents situations and a view of human nature straight out of the late Victorian era (an incredibly naive and good-hearted rich man, a Bible publisher, who becomes innocently involved with three—count 'em—"scarlet women"; his moralizing and frugal wife; and an ingenue, Nanette, whose overdue initiation into adulthood consists of her near-scandalous spending the night away from home, albeit with a chaperone.)

Its plot is an insipid imbroglia such as can be found in many late nineteenth century farces, and in dramatist's strategy it depends on creaky means of getting characters on and off the stage.

Even so, the story is tricked out in the garb of the Twen-

ties: it features titillating naughtiness and much slang from the period (Does the cat have pajamas? Oh, banana oil! Don't be a Dumb Dora. It's none of your ^{business.} ~~business.~~ ^{bees wax.} Nanette's rebellion against stuffiness, which might afford a chance for Twenties ideas to creep in, is only slightly developed. But the maid whose soliloquizing chatter opens the show now wields a noisy vacuum cleaner instead

A Review

of the feather-duster her counterpart would have had in 1875. To add another period touch to the Sullivan production, one actress (Vanessa Little) sporadically imitates the walk and talk of Mae West.

It is only the lyrics and Vincent Youmans' music which, from the perspective of 1974, seem a bit original. Of course the score contains the

favorite tunes "Tea for Two" and "I Want to Be Happy," with their somewhat inane lyrics. In the manner in which the latter song is reprised (as background for a shimmy shake, then for a bump-and-grind, then as an operatic aria), the music threatens to burst into mockery of the entire proceedings; and it more openly takes on a satirical tinge in the Finaletto for Act Two. There is a good blues song, and "You Can Dance with Any Girl" reflects some Twenties sophistication. Both are effectively rendered by Lynn Fitzpatrick.

The lively dance routine accompanying "Take a Little-One-Step" comes off smoothly.

Andy Devine's awkward mannered movements and his well-known high-pitched whine seem altogether appropriate for his role as Jimmy Smith, the naive and bewildered man with almost a million dollars. As he engagingly admits, this appearance marks his singing debut. Julie Jenner, whom Walter Winchell called the

perfect chorus girl, portrays Smith's wife.

But Martha Larrimore, with her foghorn voice (actually well-trained), steals the show as the saucy, but lovable maid, Pauline.

Actors who have taken smaller roles during this season (Lorraine Denham, Dennis Grimaldi, and Bill Wilson) graduate to larger roles and perform creditably. Their verve and brightness help to redeem the evening.

Hopefully some of the rough spots evident opening night (slow cues, muffled lines, difficulties with set pieces and lighting effects) will be smoothed out in subsequent performances.

The steep steps for Act One create unsteady and ungraceful movements; and pit voices coming over microphones, instead of strengthening the choral numbers, distract because they do not blend well, thus calling attention to the weakness they were obviously intended to overcome.

Performances continue through August 25.