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# THEY HAD VOICES THEN!

By **HOWARD KISSEL**

Daily News Drama Critic

**THE ACTORS.** By Ward Morehouse III. With Jack Aranson, Richard Waring, John Blaylock, Phyllis Craig, Lon Freeman and Ralph Douglas. Directed by Phyllis Craig. At the Royal Court Repertory Theater, 301 West 55th St.

**S**IMPLY FROM the sounds of the actors' voices, you know that "The Actors" is an exercise in nostalgia. Nowadays, actors are not expected to have virtuoso instruments: A Tonette is fine; you don't need a trumpet.

Jack Aranson and Richard Waring, who play a theater critic and a retired Shakespearean actor, have what used to be regarded as essential equipment for an actor—voices as robust and rich as vintage Bordeaux.

Residents of a run-down club that caters to theatricals, they are rivals for the affection and admiration of the critic's son, a budding playwright. The plot is not compelling, but it serves as a pretext for the characters to comment, sometimes wryly, sometimes sadly, on

the state of the theater.

As one of them remarks, "It's the end of an era, an era with no mourners."

Ward Morehouse's dialogue has the snappy and sheltered quality of people who have only limited knowledge of the "real" world, as when the manager of the club says, "We are going into Chapter 11," and one of the residents says, "I don't know that play."

"The Actors" has its melodrama as well as its gentle comedy. The play is set in 1982 and at the beginning, the critic enters with a revolver, intending to shoot the workmen tearing down the theaters on West 46th St. to make room for what would become the hideous Marriott Marquis Hotel.

The play is strongest when it comments on the state of the theater. It has a wise piece of self-criticism, when the father urges his son to put more of himself into his next play.

Under Phyllis Craig's direction, the play moves smoothly from humor to drama. Aranson and Waring are entirely convincing in portraying theater men of another generation. John



**'THE ACTORS':** Jack Aranson stars in this nostalgic outing

Blaylock has a quiet, earnest charm as the young man in whom they place their theatrical hopes.

Craig herself plays, quite capably, a former showgirl who helps bring the men

together and also solves the debt-ridden club's financial problems.

The play's amiably old-fashioned air is carefully mirrored in the set with its posters recalling happier moments in the theater.