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'The World of Suzie Wong'

A Sinner Demands Fidelity

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Jeri Miyazaki as Suzie

Sunday, June 26, 1960



JERI MIYAZAKI AS 'SUSIE'
A California understudy takes over



MARY MON TOY AS 'MINNIE HO'
Her house was not a home

By Jerry Adams

IT HAS been a long time since any one in the trade did a good public relations job for the most ancient of professions. Polly Adler was about the last one, and before her there were Anna Christie, Camille and Mary Magdalene. (Anna Lucasta flubbed it.)

Hong Kong's Suzie Wong does a crackerjack p.r. job, though, as the heroine of "The World of Suzie Wong," a play which opens Wednesday night at the Geary Theater.

As the jacket of Richard Mason's novel put it, "One comes to love Suzie." Perhaps it is because Suzie has ideals. Mothers of America will admire her attitude toward men as merely a necessary means

to an honorable end—the education of her baby boy "so that he won't grow up to be a coolie."

Men, however, may question Suzie's peculiar version of the double standard. While she demands fidelity of the man she loves, she nevertheless reasons that it's all right for her to play around because, after all, it's for the baby.

Although a relatively

simple character, Suzie (Jeri Miyazaki) has one complexity. Because she fears being regarded as "a dirty little yum-yum girl," she occasionally fancies herself as some sort of vestal virgin. When she meets her future love, painter Robert Lomax (Jack Ryland), for example, she allows him to size her up as a pure and simple maiden from one of Hong Kong's better fami-

lies by quoting her father's frequent warning: "If you talk to sailor, I beat you!" This despite the death of Suzie's pop years before the play's action begins.

But then, Lomax is so naive that he believes that the honky tonk Nam Kok Hotel on the waterfront could be a place to live.

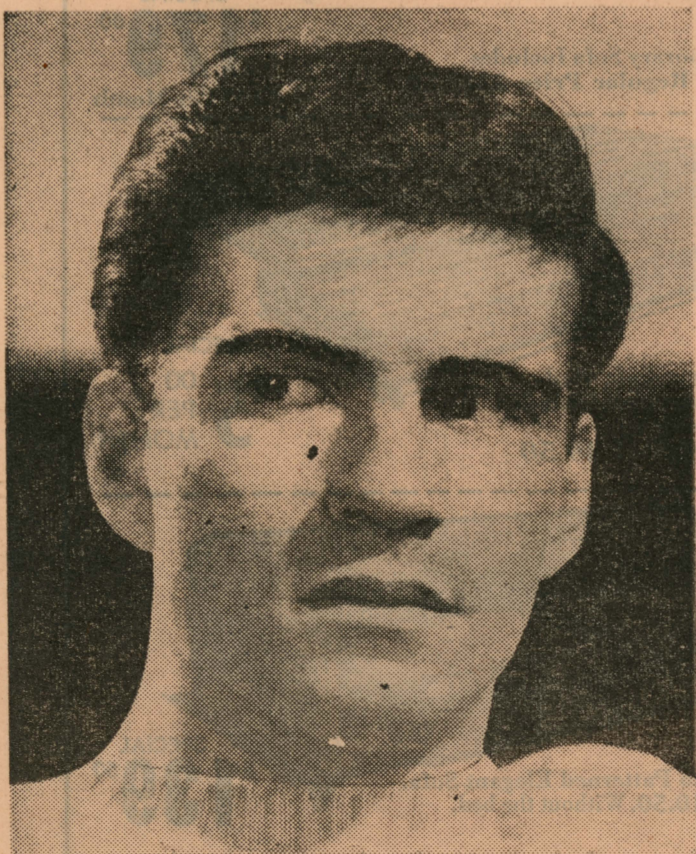
Evidently Lomax had not been around many American tourists, any of whom

might breathlessly have informed him that in Hong Kong you measure a girl's virtue by the length of the side-split in her skirt. The skirts on Suzie and colleagues are slit thigh high, so everybody knows the kind of girls she and they are.

Lomax learns the facts about the Nam Kok as a few dozen sailors drift into the place for reasons unrelated to a good night's rest. He finally learns of Suzie's tarnished virtue when, drifting on a sailor's arm, in comes Suzie.

The truth out, they nevertheless become friends. She serves as his model in long painting sessions in his room. Lomax strains audience credulity (and perhaps himself) a bit as he paints through nearly the

The Honky Tonk Girl Of Hong Kong



JACK RYLAND, as Suzie's artist lover, discovers that even vice may have its virtues

TOM HELMORE portrays a British businessman who finds a substitute for dinghy sailing





IN THE Hong Kong bar, sailors find that drinks and decoration are exotic—and everything's for sale

entire two acts before unleashing his passion. Until then he couldn't afford exclusive rights to the Wong girl. The man who can, the other man in Suzie's life, is Tom Helmore, who plays a British businessman in search of a substitute for his hobby of dinghy sailing.

Playgoers ought not to expect the play's characters and action to parallel those in the book. Playwright Paul Osborn, confronted with the task of compressing a myriad of the novel's events into two hours and two acts, wisely didn't try to transfer too much. In the process, therefore, Suzie indulges in commercial relations with one less lover.

Her readers may regret the loss of Rodney, a crew-cut American with a neurotic passion for feeling insecure. Although Rodney would have made a colorful character for the stage, says a member of the company, "He would have brought in too many complications of the plot for one evening in the theater."

Jeri Miyazaki served as understudy for Frances Nuyen in the Broadway production. Since Frances frequently didn't show, the California-born actress had many opportunities to play the role before the touring company was organized.

English actor Tom Helmore (Ben Jeffcoat) has appeared in several Broadway productions including "No Time for Comedy" and "My Fair Lady."

Jack Ryland joined the cast in Chicago, replacing Robert Elston in the role of the Canadian painter (who was English in Mason's novel). Ryland understudied the Lomax role on Broadway.

Chase Crosley plays Kay Fletcher, another female in Lomax' life, and Mary Mon Toy plays Minnie Ho, one of the girls who decorates the bar and otherwise pleases the clientele at the Nam Kok Hotel.

The Suzie show has the trappings of a big musical. Unlike most spoken plays which are confined to three

acts and one setting, this one follows the musical comedy pattern of two acts and a multitude of scenery changes. Using a revolving stage, the production "seems almost like a motion picture," according to one promotion minded showman.

There are such Jo Mielziner spectacular touches as a ferry boat that looms out of the harbor fog, and quick transitions from hotel interiors to busy Hong Kong street scenes. It also develops that Suzie Wong and Sadie Thompson have more in common than occupations, for it actually rains on stage as it did in the "Rain" production of a couple of decades back. This theatrical rarity is accomplished by means of some elaborate plumbing—a system of perforated pipes and tanks which surrounds the set while troughs on the stage level catch the water and recirculate it.

The "Suzie" company has distinguished itself in

another way. It drew people out of the Las Vegas gambling casinos for three months as it provided a different sort of entertainment for one of that town's hotels where entertainment follows a night club pattern.

For the Las Vegas production, the Riviera imposed some changes in service. Customers at the dinner show were seated at 6 p. m. and had to be finished with the meal by 8:15 p. m., at which time the waiters marched out in military formation. Dinner and show cost the 1,000 patrons each \$7.70. The midnight show required a \$4 per person minimum. Since waiters could not be filing in and out during the course of the play, drinks were ordered and served in advance. To avoid the overly diluting influence of melting ice, each table was equipped with an ice bucket.

The New Republic's Patrick Dennis acidly referred to Suzie as "the whore with the heart of gold." John

Lardner of the New Yorker noted that "Nowhere but in a brothel in a Broadway play will you find such a concentration of sweetness, light, human decency and hollow rhetoric as occurs in the Hotel Nam Kok. The Chinese girls who do business in the bar and in the rooms upstairs are as pert, as dainty, and—invariably—as cute as a cageful of canaries; they are also, at heart, as wholesome as a field-hockey team."

Initially responsible for the play "The World of Suzie Wong" were Joshua Logan, the director, and author Paul Osborn, who first achieved a rousing success in 1938 with "On Borrowed Time." Subsequently, they have been associated with the motion pictures "South Pacific" and "Sayonara" and the play, "Mornings at Seven."

Independently, Osborn wrote "Point of No Return" and Logan directed "Picnic," "Annie Get Your Gun," "Middle of the Night" and "Wish You Were Here."