

AT THE THEATRE

Charles Laughton Opens Experimental Theatre Season in Brecht's 'Galileo'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

With the friendly assistance of Charles Laughton, the Experimental Theatre has succeeded in putting on an experimental play. It is Bertolt Brecht's "Galileo," which had a fancy production at Maxine Elliott's last evening. Using Galileo's experience in science Mr. Brecht has told the age-old story of the conflict of truth with authority, for Galileo's epic struggle with the church epitomizes that part of human experience.

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It is the privilege of an experimental play to be a good deal less than perfect. "Galileo" does not impose on privilege but takes it. For it is a loose and episodic play that is unnecessarily enigmatic and puts form ahead of contents. Toward the close of a rambling evening it does capture bits of the drama implicit in the theme and does persuade you that the discovery of knowledge is a tremendous grave and exciting thing. After all, Galileo did revolutionize man's conception of his own place in the universe. Life has never been the same for anyone since he looked into the telescope and found the solar system defying the authority of the scholars.

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As produced under Joseph Losey's direction, Mr. Brecht's play diffuses the legend of Galileo across the stage, and values showmanship above the drama. On the basis of one performance, it is impossible to tell how much of the responsibility falls on Mr. Brecht and how much on Mr. Losey and Mr. Laughton for the pretentious form of the performance. Was it Mr. Brecht's idea to introduce the scenes with the futile chant of three choir-boys singing music written by Hanns Eisler? Was it Mr. Brecht's idea to present his drama as a cross between a religious masque and a carnival?

For that is how it goes—full of awe in design, but trifling and casual in texture as though everyone were ashamed to be earnest about serious matters. Mr. Laughton has demonstrated abundant good will in coming to New York to play Galileo for a fee that amounts to about \$10 a performance. This column wishes to convey the gratitude everyone feels for his generosity. Furthermore, Mr. Laughton is all actor—a constant irradiation of expression by voice, hands, face, eyes and shoulders.

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But like a showman Mr. Laughton pretty effectively throws the part of Galileo away. He is casual and contemptuous; he is ponderous and condescending, and there is a great deal of old-fashioned fiddle-faddle in his buffeting of the books and his giving of orders to the un-

GALILEO, a play in two acts and twenty scenes by Bertolt Brecht, translated into English by Charles Laughton, with music by Hanns Eisler and lyrics adapted by Albert Brush. Staged by Joseph Losey; settings and costumes by Robert Davison; original choreography by Lotte Gosler, executed by Joan McCracken; musical conductor, Josef Schmid; presented by the Experimental Theatre under the sponsorship of the American National Theatre and Academy. To be repeated tonight, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday nights and Sunday afternoon.

Singer	Richard Leone
Singer	Michael Citro
Singer	Albert Ares
Galileo	Charles Laughton
Andrea (Boy)	Michael Citro
Sarti	Hester Sondergaard
Ludovico	Philip Swander
Priuli	Fred Stewart
Sagredo	John Straub
Virginia	Joan McCracken
Federzoni	Dwight Marfield
Gentleman	Donald Symington
Bellarmin	Lawrence Ryle
Barbarini	Rusty Lane
Inquisitor	John Carradine
Andrea (Man)	Nehemiah Persoff
Giusseppl	Donald Symington
Ballade Singer	Harris Brown
Ballade Singer's Wife	Elizabeth Moore
Ballade Singer's Daughter	Iris Mann

derlings. Although his Galileo is good Laughton, it is not Galileo.

The cast includes sixty-six parts, according to the mathematician sitting to the left, and there is some good acting among them. Joan McCracken gives an excellent performance as Galileo's daughter. She catches the ecstasy and the devotion. John Carradine is likewise excellent as the Inquisitor—cunning and intelligent. At this late hour it is impossible to assign little posies of respect to all the good performers.

But "Galileo" both as a play and performance is finger-tips play-making. And the production is stuffed to the ears with hokum. Nothing the play says justifies Mr. Brecht's humble and fearful prayer for science in the brief epilogue.