

## Ballad in 3 Acts Based on Story by Dreiser

By BROOKS ATKINSON

THANKS to the Phoenix Theatre, another original musical has come to Second Avenue. It is "Sandhog," which opened there last evening.

Some testy reservations will be recorded further along in this review, where they will be less conspicuous. Here it is proper to point out that Earl Robinson and Waldo Salt, the authors, and a long list of associates have told in musical form the story of digging a tunnel under the North River in the Eighteen Eighties. "Sandhog" is based on a short story by Theodore Dreiser, "St. Columba and the River," which was based, in turn, on an actual episode. For it is true that a sandhog was blown up through the muck to the surface of the river and lived to tell the tale.

Since Mr. Robinson composed "Ballad for Americans," it is logical for him to call "Sandhog" a "ballad in three acts." That may also account for the fact that the "Sandhog Song" has a stirring and familiar musical ring. Mr. Robinson and Mr. Salt have told the story of a cocky Irish immigrant who gets a job digging a tunnel under the river, marries and has twins, becomes involved in a fatal accident, leaves the tunnel, returns when his money has gone and becomes the man who is blown up through the river in the last scene.

By using his brains as well as his slide-rule, Howard Bay has built a unit set that manages to catch an impression of New York on the surface and serve also as the tunnel and the entrance through the air-lock. Most of the story is told in music, embellished with saucy sidewalk dancing designed by Sophie Maslow.

Since the music is chiefly in narrative form (incidentally with too much recitative for this column's taste) there are fewer "song hits" than the routine musical play yields. But the Irish melody, "Johnny O," gloriously sung by Jack Cassidy and Betty Oakes, is a beguiling piece of work. Alice Ghostley's "By the Glenside" is another romantic number, and she sings it enchantingly. David Brooks, a splendid singer and likable actor, has a number of utilitarian songs—like "Work Song" and "Sweat Song," which are an essential



Two of the leading couples appearing in "Sandhog," Jack Cassidy and Betty Oakes, left; Alice Ghostley and David Brooks.

### The Cast

SANDHOG, a ballad in three acts by Earl Robinson and Waldo Salt, based on Theodore Dreiser's short story "St. Columba and the River." Staged by Howard Da Silva; presented by the Phoenix Theatre (T. Edward Hambleton and Norris Haughton) by special arrangement with Rachel Productions (Mr. Da Silva and Arnold Perl); production and lighting designed by Howard Bay; choreography by Sophie Maslow; musical direction by Ben Steinberg; orchestrations by Hershey Kay. At the Phoenix Theatre.

Sandy	.....David Winters
Small Fry	.....Ellot Feld
Girl With a Ball	.....Betty Ageloff
Ring Leader	.....Yuriko Red
Red	.....Muriel Menings
Air Lock Foreman	.....John Carter
Night Shift Foreman	.....David Hooks
Sam on the Stick	.....Leon Elbb
Henderson	.....Mordecai Bauman
Policeman	.....Robert De Cormier
Bill Cayton	.....Douglas Collins
Johnny O'Sullivan	.....Jack Cassidy
Fred Burger	.....Paul Ukena
Joe Novak	.....Michael Kermoyan
Andy Cayton	.....Rodester Timmons
Tim Cavanaugh	.....David Brooks
Katie O'Sullivan	.....Betty Oakes
Sharkey	.....Gordon Dilworth
Sheela Cavanaugh	.....Alice Ghostley
Mary Novak	.....Mary Kane
Ginny Cayton	.....Mareda Galther

part of the story. He sings them with gusto and affability. The score as a whole is not exactly inspired. But it does succeed in the considerable

feat of expressing a long, human story in terms of joy, fear, mourning and exultation, and must be set down as a notable achievement on that technical account.

And now for those reservations. Since it is the story of a fabulous construction job, "Sandhog" somehow seems too mannered and genteel, as though it came out of the minds of the authors rather than the muscles and bones of the workmen. There are a couple of scenes in the tunnel, both of them rude, sinewy and exciting. But the skeleton of "Sandhog" is hardly more than the conventional story of an immigrant who gets married, has friends and troubles and in the final scene succeeds.

To most of us, construction jobs seem like heroic works. They are Paul Bunyan labors, and they should be told on a big scale. "Sandhog" is a little on the academic side, as if Mr. Robinson and Mr. Salt were on the outside looking in. It lacks size, depth and vigor.

No doubt, that is counsel of perfection. For it is obvious that in the musical drama field, "Sandhog" is enterprising and versatile. As the director, Howard Da Silva has woven the multitudinous details of a big production into a fabric of music, story and dancing. This is another one of the things that only the Phoenix can do; and, again, the Phoenix has done it.