

Project Shaw Attracts Top Talent and Packs Them In at The Players

by Robert Windeler

If, like most of us, you missed Noel Coward and Margaret Leighton in the 1953 London revival of George Bernard Shaw's *The Apple Cart*, you might get a rare chance to see a reading of the 1929 comedy at the Club on Monday, September 18 at 7 p.m., when Project Shaw resumes its inaugural season after the August hiatus. Brian Murray and Player Marian Seldes will enact the leads in this futuristic play, in which Shaw has the United States trying to colonize the United Kingdom. Simon Jones, George S. Irving and Charlotte Rae will also be in the cast.

"Might" is the operative word here; although the readings in Project Shaw are free of charge, reservations are required, and have always filled up within hours of first being taken, usually on the first Monday of every month. Like all of the series offerings to date, the July reading, John Bull's *Other Island*, featuring Murray, Marc Kudish and Malachy McCourt, played to capacity.

The brainchild of Player David Staller, who produces and directs the series, Project Shaw will attempt to present all 50 of Shaw's plays, both famous and obscure (some of them one-acts, which will be done in pairs or groups). Starting in January with *Arms and the Man*, Project Shaw has presented *Heartbreak House* and *You Never Can Tell*, along with the lesser-known *Fanny's First Play*, *Getting Married* and two one-acts, *Overruled* and *Augustus Does His Bit*.

Sally Ann Howes is coming out of retirement to play Mrs. Tarleton in the October 23 reading of *Misalliance*. Paxton Whitehead and Andrea Marcovici will also star. Veanne Cox will headline *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* on November 20. The December 18 reading of *The Philanderer* has yet to be cast.

Because the presentations are readings, they may have only one full rehearsal under Equity regulations. (Individual cast members

may request rehearsals, as Seldes and Murray have done for *The Apple Cart*). Staller, who also serves as casting director and dramaturge, says it is essential "to cast the plays as well as I can with people of exalted caliber, to give us all a sense of security so that we can concentrate on the work."

Shaw, who lived to the age of 94 and enjoyed his celebrity and prolixity until his death in 1950, spoke at The Players a few times. Staller also feels that the Club's ambience and membership are appropriate to the project, despite offers to move the series to another venue. His one regret is that, to date, non-members have made up the majority of the audiences, although Players get notice of the readings before the public does. A cash bar is open before and after the show and during intermission. Project Shaw already has been the subject of 15 feature articles in major publications, including two in *The New York Times*. All of them naturally have mentioned The Players.