



Courtesy of Citadel Press

## Garbo's best performance stirs laughter in audience

"Garbo laughs!" was the promise of MGM propaganda, preparing 1939 audiences for the release of "Ninotchka."

So American audiences waited for the revelation of an all-new Greta Garbo — a comedienne.

Audiences found it worth their wait.

"Don't pronounce it... See it!" movie posters advised.

And after the successful premiere of "Ninotchka" in New York's Radio City Music Hall on Nov. 9, 1939, everybody in the country saw Garbo's first comedy.

Louis B. Mayer's number one actress was America's favorite actress. With more than 20 films made to her credit, Garbo had yet to star in a film that was not a tragedy.

Of course, Mayer was against his top tragic star revealing herself in an outright comedy. Garbo herself welcomed the change, and said that it would be a pleasure not to have to die at the end of a film.

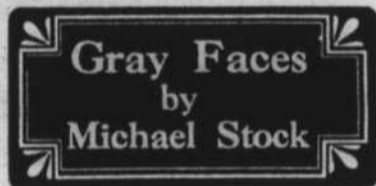
Producer/director Ernst Lubitsch talked with Garbo on more than one occasion about his plans for motion pictures. Lubitsch followed the popular hope that Stalin and Hitler would destroy each other, and bought a script about the subject.

Melchior Lengyel's original story was a social comedy, poking its fun in the form of anti-Communist propaganda.

Garbo gave her first reading of the story a mixed review. She worried that the story was only propaganda and that she wasn't fit for such a comedy.

Lubitsch responded by hiring MGM scenarists, Charles Brackett, Billy Wilder and Walter Reisch, to fashion the script especially for Garbo.

Both MGM studio and Lubitsch put the pressure to Garbo to take



the role of Ninotchka.

"I will do anything for you. I will change the dialogue. I will change the actors. I will rewrite the scenario completely. But you must play in this comedy, because it will be your greatest success," Lubitsch promised.

It was.

The first half of "Ninotchka" is dominated by a frumpy, straight-laced Garbo, as a "good Russian" dedicated to the state. The on-screen hi-jinx of veteran-character actors, Sig Rumann, Felix Bressart and Alexander Granach as bumbling Soviet comrades, fall hilariously under the spell of Melvyn Douglas and the capitalist world.

Lubitsch had a particular adoration for Bressart and Rumann, with them starring in several other Lubitsch films, Bressart in "The Shop Around the Corner" with James Stewart and Margaret Sullavan, and Rumann starring in Lubitsch's 1942 comedy, "To Be Or Not To Be," starring Carole Lombard and Jack Benny.

Garbo considered Lubitsch's casting very clever. Lubitsch cast Ina Claire, who never got along with Garbo, as her rival. Douglas was supposedly in love with Garbo off camera, as well as in "Ninotchka." This could account for that occasional gleam in Douglas' eye that otherwise seems like a hell of a piece of acting.

Douglas is the perfect foil for a smiling Garbo, all under the masterful comedic directing of Lubitsch.

Looking over Paris from the Eiffel Tower, Garbo provides the Russian outlook of a beautiful view of the city's lights.

"They are the unfortunate product

of a doomed culture. I feel very sorry for you," Garbo admonishes.

"Oh, but you must admit that this doomed civilization sparkles. Look. It glitters," Douglas teases.

"I do not deny its beauty. But it's a waste of electricity," Garbo pronounces dryly.

Much of "Ninotchka's" humor is socially conscious of Stalin's growing power and the rise of Communism. Lubitsch's humor is in finest form when Garbo meets Douglas' butler.

"Is this what you call the butler? ... This man is very old. You shouldn't make him work ... " Garbo states sadly.

"He looks sad. Do you whip him?" Garbo asks innocently.

"No, but the mere thought makes my mouth water," Douglas jokes.

"The day will come when you will be free," Garbo tells the puzzled butler.

Lubitsch's constant critical patter about Stalin's Soviets delighted audiences, but made Mayer very nervous in the politically unstable world of 1939.

"Ninotchka" garnered four Oscar nominations, including Best Picture, Best Original Story, Best Screenplay and Garbo's fourth Best Actress nomination.

However, 1939 was the year of "Gone With the Wind," leaving every film that year, including the perfect "Ninotchka," without an Oscar.

"Ninotchka" is both Garbo's and Lubitsch's finest filmmaking moment. Lubitsch crafted "Ninotchka" especially for Garbo. Garbo crafted "Ninotchka" for anyone who loves romantic comedy.

Stock is a senior English major and a Daily Nebraskan reporter and columnist.

## 'Privilege' weaves themes, contains weak transitions

By Robert Richardson  
Senior Reporter

Yvonne Rainer has been touted as an avant-garde filmmaker with special abilities to present everyday ideas in obscure ways.

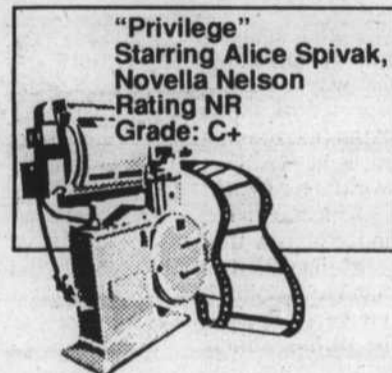
Her latest film does just that. "Privilege" takes one main theme and tailors several smaller themes so tightly around it that they are sometimes interwoven.

Yvonne Washington (Novella Nelson) has decided that with some of her medical expertise she wants to make a movie about women; the topic is menopause.

After she enlists the help of Jenny (Alice Spivak), who has been showing signs of the symptom for more than five years, Yvonne and Jenny embark on a sort of emotional roller-coaster ride that Jenny hasn't been on for more than 20 years.

It is through Jenny's time travel to the past that we meet a former neighbor, Brenda (Blaire Baron), and the audience starts seeing the different kinds of realities Rainer wants brought to the surface.

Class struggle, racism and sexism (lesbianism) are subplots within the



"Privilege"  
Starring Alice Spivak,  
Novella Nelson  
Rating NR  
Grade: C+

complicated plot of "Privilege." Rainer presents her ideas about these societal problems in her made-to-order fashion — as an added spice to the original theme.

The only problem Rainer has with her many-issued movie is transitions. They are weak and don't tie the scenes together, which makes "Privilege" a somewhat confusing movie.

Because of Rainer's inadequate transitions, the movie loses some of its substance, which is sad because it is hard to find someone of Rainer's experience to tackle subjects that so

See MOVIE on 8

## Mindlessness is Wonder-ful

By Michael Stock  
Senior Reporter

Summer is a good time for mindlessness. Not that the Wonder Stuff is mindless tripe. It's just a hell of a lot of fun.

The Wonder Stuff used to be lots of big guitars with such intellectual titles as "It's Yer Money I'm After, Baby," NME's number one single of the decade, "Radio Asskiss," or "Astley In A Noose" — a tender little ditty planning the assassination of the ineane and talentless fop, Rick Astley.

With the release of their new LP, "Never Loved Elvis," The Wonder Stuff still manage to get a couple of hummers off. "The Size of A Cow," and "Welcome To The Cheap Seats," are the most notable examples of sheer lunacy. Sheer talented lunacy.

"The Size Of A Cow" is the first single, and has already reached a godlike Top Five status in the U.K.. This delightful little ditty is guaranteed to make you feel so happy that your face could fall off. Which is good if you're into that sort of thing.

If you're looking for something to numb you out of existence, look elsewhere. These chaps are far from brain dead.

Crazy, rattling tambourines and a Hammond organ provide for hours of fun in the same Beatles-esque vein as some of "Sgt. Pepper."

"Oh wow, look at me now, I'm building up my problems to the size of a cow," croons a confused Miles Hunt.

If you were trying to compare your problems to the relative proportions of a cow, I wouldn't expect you to make a hell of a lot of sense either. Loosen up.



"Never Loved Elvis"  
The Wonder Stuff  
Polydor/Polygram  
Records  
Grade: A

"Welcome To the Cheap Seats" and "Maybe" utilize an accordion like it hasn't been used in years. That old, wrinkled guy on Lawrence Welk is probably rolling over right about now in a grave of tiny bubbles.

Both songs are reminiscent of the mindless ale-influenced trips through Irish pubs with all 21 members of the late, great Dexy's Midnight Runners. Or however the hell many people were in that band. I counted at least 20 different pairs of overalls in the "Come On, Eileen" video.

"In another world, yeah, he could wear a dress," Miles yelps to a pub-song sway, undoubtedly spilling ale all over himself.

"Caught In My Shadow" is the second single in the U.K. — a tiny pop song with more pop hooks than I've ever heard in one song. If you've got toes, tap 'em. If you've got a tongue, well... look at the lyric sheet and giggle a bunch.

It's fun. It's summer. Summer is mindless.

Anyway, what the hell is ten bucks when you don't have a brain in your head?