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Hirson-Schwartz Show
Is Directed by Fosse

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An amiable and racy musical, "Pippin," which arrived at the Imperial Theater last night, has three great things to commend it. It is one of the best musical stagings to be seen on Broadway in years, it is most beautifully designed and it might well do for the actor Ben Vereen what "Cabaret" did for Joel Grey.

"Pippin" is about Pippin, or, if we are going to be historically accurate, Pepin. But the musical is not going to be historically accurate, and it is none the worse for that. Pippin, or Pepin, was the son of Charlemagne, and this musical is set in the year 780 and concerns the Holy Roman Empire, but not too hoily or imperially.

The book has been written by Roger O. Hirson and the music and lyrics are by Stephen Schwartz, composer of the international hit "Godspell." The concept, and it is a conceptual musical of the type people are fond of dubbing "innovative," has Pippin's career spelled out for him by a troupe of Callot-like commedia dell'arte clowns. There is someone, a solitary figure in modern dress, who is called the Leading Player, and is a cross between master of ceremonies, manager of the troupe and God. He tells us of the life and times of Pippin.

Pippin is an extraordinary young man, the son of a great Emperor, talented and

The Cast

PIPPIN, a musical comedy by Roger O. Hirson, music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz; setting by Tony Walton; costumes by Patricia Zipprodt; lighting by Jules Fisher; musical direction by Stanley Labovsk; orchestrations, Ralph Burns; dance arrangements by John Berkman; sound by Abe Jacob; hair styles by Ernest Adler; directed and choreographed by Bob Fosse; production stage manager, Phil Friedman. Presented by Stuart Ostro. At the Imperial Theater, 249 West 45th Street.

Leading Player	Ben Vereen
Pippin	John Rubinstein
Charles	Eric Berry
Lewis	Christopher Chadman
Fastrada	Leland Palmer
Musician	John Mineo
The Head	Roger Hamilton
Berthe	Irene Ryan
Bosser	Richard Korfaze
Peasant	Pat Selen
Noble	Gene Foale
Field Marshal	Roger Hamilton
Catherine	Jill Clayburgh
Theo	Shane Nickerson

handsome. Yet he feels the "need to be completely fulfilled." He tries war, sex, revolution and domesticity. All to no avail. As a grand finale he is offered the ultimate transfiguration of fire, death by immolation in a magician's hoop. Not unpredictably he refuses this and settles back for domesticity, wife and family.

It is, I felt, a trite and uninteresting story with aspirations to a seriousness it never for one moment fulfills. It is a commonplace set to rock music, and I must say I found most of the music somewhat characterless. Perhaps it needs to be heard more. I enjoyed "Godspell" more with repetition, but at first echo this new score lacked something in style and scope. It is nevertheless consistently tuneful and contains a few rock ballads that could prove memorable.

What will certainly be memorable is the staging by Bob Fosse. This is fantastic. It takes a painfully ordinary little show and launches it into space.

From the first moment un-

Ben Vereen Stands Out
as the Narrator

til almost the last (for nothing can totally redeem the book's lame duck ending) Mr. Fosse never loses his silk and velvet grasp on the show. He works desperately—and successfully—hard to give the tired old idea of a group of clowns some artificial resuscitation — he even makes sense of the superhuman commentator and he gives the show the pace of a roller derby and the finesse of a conjuror. Yet nothing seems strained or exaggerated.

Mr. Fosse has achieved complete continuity between his staging and his choreography, and his dances themselves have art and imagination. They swing with life. Mind you, Mr. Fosse has two master collaborators in Tony Walton and Patricia Zipprodt.

Mr. Walton's scenery manages an almost impossible combination of Holy Roman Empire and Fifth Avenue chic. He has also provided scenery that will slide, fold, make itself scarce when necessary, and when equally necessary even adaptable. This is exactly suited to Mr. Fosse's pell-mell dazzle. Miss Zipprodt has accomplished her task with equal adroitness and elegance — her clowns look Italian and Fellini and her girls look French and naked. It is probably just right for the Holy Roman Empire.

The cast also lives up to Mr. Fosse rather than down to its material. Eric Berry is fun as the bibulous, cynical Charlemagne, Leland Palmer splendid as his Jewish mother



Irene Ryan leading a number

of a wife and Jill Clayburgh all sweet connivance as the widow out to get her man. Irene Ryan has one tremendous show-stopper as a geriatric swinger and John Rubinstein possesses all the natural grace and radiance needed for this Candide-like hero.

It was, I felt, Mr. Vereen who really held the show together. Following his demonic performance last season as Judas in "Jesus Christ Superstar," Mr. Vereen here shows all the makings of a superstar himself. His mock-

ing presence and voice, his deft dancing and easy authority, make his performance one of the most impressive aspects of the evening.

The book is feeble and the music bland, yet the show runs like a racehorse. It was probably Mr. Fosse's night, and playgoers contemplating an evening of theatrical prestidigitation, a handful of most pleasing performances and a few notably pretty girls (I'd wondered whatever happened to Jennifer Nairn-Smith after she left the New York City Ballet) will not be disappointed.