

# TV: 'Requiem for a Heavyweight'

## Rod Serling's Drama Scores a Knockout

By JACK GOULD

**R**EQUIEM FOR A HEAVYWEIGHT," by Rod Serling, presented last night on "Playhouse 90," was a play of overwhelming force and tenaciousness. It was an artistic triumph that featured a performance of indescribable eloquence by Jack Palance in the part of the inarticulate has-been of the prize ring.

Mr. Serling wrote a searing, inspired indictment of the worst side of the prize-fight game, the greedy mortals who live off the flesh and blood of helpless youths who want to be champions. His play depicted the utter brutality and inhumanity of a so-called sport that can leave men in the wreckage of their own punch-drunk double talk.

The essential figure of "Requiem for a Heavyweight" was a fighter who fought once too often and was told by a physician that he could not continue. But his avaricious manager, having taken the boy's health, now covets his spirit; he wants to use him as a clown in a wrestling match.

Only a compassionate second arranges for the towering man to take a train home to Tennessee; the fighter then has visions of making some use of his life after all. But on the train he shows a little boy how to box, and in the process he starts refighting his own past matches.

The climax may have been a little obscure. It could have been interpreted that in helping the youth the fighter had found himself. Or that for some pugilists, there never is an escape from the ring. Either way, Mr. Serling's play had immense power and poetry, and is certain to win many a prize.

Mr. Palance contributed a brilliant interpretation of the fighter. He projected the man's incoherence and bewilderment with a superb regard for details. To the huge and scar-ridden boxer he imparted

a glowing and tragic humaneness.

Ed Wynn, in his debut in a straight drama, was very good as the second who put a man's pride before the purse. His son, Keenan Wynn, playing the ruthless manager, was not quite so successful; he seemed neither smooth nor mean enough to be entirely convincing. Maxie Rosenbloom had several very good scenes as the reigning monarch of the babbling hangers-on in a saloon patronized by former fighters.

Mr. Serling and Mr. Palance contributed a notable evening of theatre last night on Channel 2.

## New Interview Program

For those whose taste doesn't run to "The Late Movie" or the repetitious Steve Allen, there is a new and promising show at 11 P. M. on Channel 5. It is a sixty-minute presentation on which Mike Wallace conducts some extremely good interviews with worth-while people and doesn't shy away from controversial matters. The program could very easily turn out to be a late-evening hit.

Mr. Wallace received his baptism of fire on Wednesday and acquitted himself most creditably. Incidentally, he also hewed to a pattern of journalistic behavior that could be copied more widely on the TV airwaves.

The Tuesday topic was the scrap between Broadcast Music, Inc., and the group of litigating song writers in the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers. B. M. I. officials insisted that the issue should be confined to the courts and refused to participate, which left Mr. Wallace with a studio filled with ASCAP partisans.

Mr. Wallace could have abandoned the discussion on the grounds he could not present both sides. However, this would have invoked the unwise principle of allowing one party to a dispute to exercise a veto on any discussion whatsoever.

Instead, Mr. Wallace and Station WABD boned up on the B. M. I. version of the controversy. With this ammunition, Mr. Wallace then fired questions at the pro-ASCAP

guests. The result was that the composers, including Arthur Schwartz, Harold Rome and Dorothy Fields, had a chance to state their position, but through the questions a viewer learned that there was more than just their side of the story. In short, the conflict was kept in balanced perspective and not allowed, as occurred earlier over WABD, to become a half-hour commercial for the composer group.

As a reporter, Mr. Wallace proved himself forthright and to the point without ever becoming opinionated or irritable himself; on the midnight shift in broadcasting this is something of an innovation.

On Wednesday night Mr. Wallace also presented a fashion show which actually made a little sense and offered a review of the Broadway opening night by Byron Bentley of Theatre Arts Monthly.

The show closed with a glimpse of the front pages of the morning newspapers. If Mr. Wallace has reportorial luck and meets enough interesting people, his show should find its niche.