

OSCAR SERLIN, 70, PRODUCER, IS DEAD

Stage Hit 'Life With Father'

Made Him a Millionaire

Oscar Serlin, who produced the hit play, "Life With Father," died yesterday in his home at 53 East 91st Street, after a long illness. He was 70 years old.

In his review of the play, which opened at the Empire Theater on Nov. 9, 1939, Brooks Atkinson wrote in The New York Times: "Sooner or later everyone will have to see 'Life With Father.'"

And almost everyone did. The play ran 3,213 performances—to break the previous record of 3,182 held by "Tobacco Road." There were successful road companies and a London production. The play was made into a movie, which was shown on television for the first time three weeks ago.

"For," as Mr. Atkinson wrote of the opening, "the late Clarence Day's vastly amusing sketches of his despotic parent have now been translated into a perfect comedy by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse and must be reckoned an authentic part of our American folklore." Mr. Lindsay and Dorothy Stickney were the stars.

Held Assorted Jobs

The production made a millionaire of Mr. Serlin, whose career included a variety of positions, ranging from theater doorman to talent scout and assistant to David O. Selznick for motion pictures, including "Gone With the Wind."

Mr. Serlin, a tall, dark, soft-spoken man, who dressed impeccably, became inactive as a producer in 1951. He concluded an article in Theater Arts some years ago thus:

"The spirited young need the nutrition of the theater. We can aid them in the acquisition of joy and hope and belief in the future, and of the cultural habit of going to the theater where every day is Christmas. When that new day comes . . . the young, with dynamite in their souls, courage in their hearts and juice in their veins, will reflect their world in their theater!"

He was born in Yalowa (Grundow), Russian Poland, on Jan. 30, 1901, and was brought to Chicago at the age of 9. His Russian-accented English was ridiculed by his playmates. Determined to speak perfect English, he stood for hours before a full-length mirror, carefully enunciating each syllable, and as a result, became interested in acting.

He attended De Paul Academy and De Paul University in Chicago, becoming an all-Cook County football player and captain of the team at De Paul.

Mr. Serlin came to New York as an assistant to an old friend, Marion Gering. Together, they produced "Skidding," which was to form the basis of the Judge Hardy film saga.

Their next venture was Martin Flavin's "Broken Dishes," which brought Bette Davis to Broadway, after which he was hired by Paramount Pictures as a talent scout.

At Paramount from 1933 to 1937, he worked up to head the Eastern talent department and to associate producer. An able publicist, he popularized the expression, "talent scout." He was credited with sending Cary Grant, Fred MacMurray and Dorothy Lamour to Hollywood, and had participated in the hunt for a Scarlett O'Hara for the film version of "Gone with the Wind."

A corollary to Mr. Serlin's production of "Life With Father" was a vendetta between him and the Shubert brothers. After looking over several Shubert theaters for his show and finding them unsatisfactory, he rented the Empire Theater, an independent house. The Shuberts made it hard for Mr. Serlin to get theaters for his out-of-town and road companies.

In 1939, he produced a documentary film, "The City," for the Carnegie Foundation for the World's Fair here, and in 1942 John Steinbeck's play, "The Moon Is Down." In 1948-49, he put on the sequel play, "Life With Mother," which had 265 showings here.

In 1948, Mr. Serlin coordinated the "American National Theater Album" at the Ziegfeld Theater, a benefit to promote the national work of ANTA.

Surviving are his widow, the former Babette Block; two sons, Michael and Anthony; a daughter, Mrs. Dorothy Arndt; a brother, Bernard; two sisters, Mrs. Benjamin Waller and Mrs. Norman Saper, and four grandchildren.