

FIRST NIGHT

Sound (if unusual) first night advice for the West End playwright (an extract from The Train And Other Ghosts by Arnold Ridley).

After the fall of the curtain on the first night of *The Ghost Train* I was either persuaded or pushed onto the stage to make a speech. I have a vague recollection of stammering something but I learnt my lesson. The appearance of the author is always fatal in the West End. If he appears trembling and with ashen face in comparison with the ‘made up’ actors lined up behind him to mumble inarticulate thanks, he is at such a disadvantage that members of the audience are likely to say: ‘Oh, so that’s the miserable twerp who wrote it, is it? Well, it wasn’t very good was it?’ On the other hand, should he stride onto the stage, smiling and complacent, and deliver carefully-rehearsed, well-spoken words, a critic may well think: Ha-ha! The cocky so-and-so thinks he’s written a winner, does he? Wait until he reads the notices! After the first night at St Martin’s whenever possible – I hid at the back of the dress circle shouting ‘Author! Author!’ at the top of my voice. Not only did this conceal my identity from idiots who may have used physical force to propel me onto the stage but it is a useful contribution to the enthusiasm.