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AGENCIES AND RADIO OUT

For Release Sun., April 24 1977

Theater Week: Woody Allen

FROM AP NEWSFEATURES

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By WILLIAM GLOVER

AP Drama Writer

NEW YORK AP - Doorknobs, it is true, fly off at his approach, rustic spiders somehow pierce his urban nest, and other improbable mischiefs befall with fiendish regularity.

Just don't call Woody Allen a schnook.

"They've really laid it on me with a trowel," the owl-eyed comic laments his media image.

"That's a very inaccurate appraisal of me, I'm not nearly as creepy as they've made out."

In contrast to the widespread impression about him generated by many articles over the past decade, Allen calls himself "just a normally unhappy, normally incompetent, alienated middle-of-the-road person."

Having been on the Freudian couch frequently, he surmises descriptions of him as an archtypal nebbish could be a release "for others to exorcise their own negative feelings - which is fine, I guess."

Allen's self-appraisal paused briefly as he made a sudden leprechaun leap, arms wildly waving, at a curtained window. Outside, a sedate pigeon was strolling along a stone balustrade. The bird fluttered off.

"I'm in a bad seat to hear the cooing," Allen apologized. "I'm still not a great lover of anything with four feet or feathers."

Serenity restored, the conversation turned to other aspects of the Allen persona, particularly as revealed in his latest written-directed-acted film, "Annie Hall."

The story is about the on-again, off-again relationship of a modern couple. Much attention is paid to the physical aspects of togetherness - another aspect of his creative imperative which he feels needs clarification.

"I don't know why people think of me in relation to sex - they really shouldn't," he insists. "I've directed a half dozen pictures and all but one got a PG rating. In this one there is no nudity, no explicit language."

A bit further along, however, he concedes that "sex and death are the two most relevant things to talk about in any art form. But I'm always a clean film maker."

The movie has been catalogued by several critics as his most autobiographical.

"It's about half true and half exaggerated enormously," Allen says. "my own life is not all that funny."

Allen was born 41 years ago in the flatlands of Brooklyn. He has always used personal incident for his droll output but doesn't feel he is now developing into either an American Fellini or Bergman as a user of the screen for private catharsis.

"They're both geniuses and beyond anything I could do," he says. The biggest influences on him have been Charlie Chaplin and the Marx brothers.

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NEW YORK: Marx brothers.

Friendship is a key factor on the cinematic front. Allen likes "to be surrounded by people I know, but I wouldn't use them if they weren't highly competent," he says of the recurrent appearance in his films of such players as Tony Roberts, Janet Margolin and, most of all, Diane Keaton.

"I never consider the general audience for what I do," he continues. "It's too spread out, all over the world. I do what I like and what my close friends like. About six of them - they're the ones I have to face."

Soon after emerging 15 years ago from the anonymity of writing jokes for TV familiars such as Sid Caesar, Art Carney, Carol Burnett and Garry Moore, Allen moved on from night club performance to writing two plays for Broadway.

"Don't Drink the Water" and "Play It Again, Sam," were both successes, and the latter became a movie. He no longer has interest in the stage.

"The theater has degenerated," he says. "There's almost nothing thrilling. The Times Square district is lousy, and what happens there is local."

"A movie is all over the country - it isn't the money that matters, it's simply a better experience now."

Allen would like a change of pace the next time out with cameras. Like the clown who would play Hamlet, Allen feels ready for "a very serious picture," though he probably would just write and direct it and not perform.

He explains: "Maybe I'll take a year and see what happens. If it didn't work, it might be a good learning process."

He has a contract for comedies, so special permission would be needed from the money people. This, he feels, shouldn't be an insuperable barrier.

"I've never made a film that cost more than three million, and I think they could afford to indulge me in one picture."

The pigeon was back on the balustrade, apparently listening intently. Allen studiously ignored it.

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