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TODD CONTINUED

La Toilette, by the French painter Bouguereau. The painting hangs in the living room of Miss Lec's Manhattan mansion with the price tag still attached to the frame: \$2,475.

Todd has managed to get along amiably enough with nearly all his leading ladies except Mac West. Trouble started right off with the casting of *Catherine Was Great* when Miss West ordered "the biggest, handsomest brutes in town" for her male cast. It was pointed out to her that because of the war all the biggest, handsomest brutes were in the armed services. Miss West then mentioned one brute who she knew was not in service—a Pacific Coast wrestler of astounding proportions who grunted professionally under the name of Wee Willie. Todd freighted Wee Willie to New York, where it was discovered that he was totally incapable of retaining lines, even not very difficult lines like "yes" and "no." He was freighted back to California.



FLAME DANCER Page was an early star for Todd.

Todd put his fourth wartime musical, *Up in Central Park*, into the hit class more or less by trickery. It was a pictorially delightful little show, with music by Sigmond Romberg and a book dealing with New York during the boodle grabs of the

Tweed Ring. But as opening time drew near, almost everybody concerned became increasingly certain that the critics would not share Todd's confidence in the show. Todd got around this by opening it on a Saturday night—too late for the critics to get their reviews into the Sunday papers. After the performance he blew the entire first-night audience to a magnificent champagne-and-caviar party in Central Park's Tavern-on-the-Green, to which the guests were conveyed in broughams, hansom cabs, barouches, victorias and tallyhos. Jimmy Walker, New York's playboy ex-mayor, stated flatly that it was the finest party since the days of Diamond Jim Brady. The gulp-by-gulp reports of the party in the Monday newspapers took attention away from the critics' reviews. Ticket buyers began jostling at the box office that morning and the show was the season's top money maker on Broadway. In its annual review of the 1944-45 theatrical season a national magazine described Todd as "dough-heavy."

This was an error. For several years Todd's financial affairs had been comparable to the situation depicted in the old radical cartoon showing a cow being fed at one end by honest toilers and milked at the other by a bloated capitalist wearing a silk hat. The huge profits from the hits produced by the hard-working Mike Todd were being milked away faster than they were made by parimutuel systems at the race tracks and better gin rummy players at the Friars Club. In one of his syndicated columns, Damon

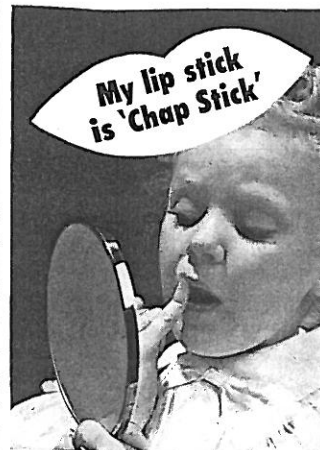


STRIPPER Lee starred in two of Todd's big hits.

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MAE WEST became a Todd star in her own play, *Catherine Was Great*. She played role as a kind of imperial version of "Come up and see me some time."



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