

RW&M (Red, White and Maddox)  
(Originally published January 1969)

While in Atlanta for a medical meeting, we took a night off and went to see the Theater Atlanta production, *Red, White and Maddox*. It was one of the final performances before its move up to the major league in New York, and it played to a packed audience. After the novelty of Lester and cornpone Southern accents wears off, it may not do as well away from home base.

The Theater Atlanta group, with its Wit's-End style of happy-but-oh-so meaningful jingling, constant song and dance, has heard itself described as clever so often that it has come to take its own superficial sophistication with seriousness and feels obliged to propound A Message. The Message, delivered with Chicken Little gravity, is: "Watch out! The sky is falling! And it's all the fault of you Bad Guys."

This frenetic, musical morality play divides the world into two camps, Good Guys and Bad Guys. There is never any doubt that the Theater Atlanta performers consider themselves, Negroes, bearded protesters, pot smokers, slum dwellers, flower children, the late Martin Luther King and his widow Coretta, and all dead and living Kennedy's Good Guys. The Bad Guys are the rest of us slobs who worry about law, order and paying taxes, along with the military, the bankers, businessmen, self-seeking politicians, Mayor Daley, brutal police, rednecks and God-fearing Bible quoters.

The object of Theater Atlanta's scorn is our patriotic and pathetic, little man Governor Lester Maddox, the fellow they helped put in office by not voting or writing in for Arnall. As a subject, Governor Maddox makes an easy target for ridicule even though, on his own, he needs little help in this respect. In the performance he is seldom off stage, and it may be that too much of Lester, even in caricature, is too much.

*RW&M* is a typically, fast moving exercise in satire, that easiest of all literary and performing art forms, and throughout the long first of two acts the audience was entertained and receptive. By the second act, after the Message had been bludgeoned home repeatedly, the applause sounded self-conscious and at the end, as the audience filed out almost in silence, the few who were humming the hit tune about equaled those who were repeating some of the four-letter words.

If you enjoy making fun of Lester and like your electronic shock therapy to the accompaniment of clever songs, gunshots, assassination scenes, and mourning Kennedy's, don't miss it.