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Writer's "Time Element" Stars William Bendix on Desilu Playhouse

Written by Jack Gould

Rod Serling is one of the pioneer television writers who still stays in the medium even though he is as articulate as video's expatriates about TV's limitations.

Last night on "Desilu Playhouse" on Channel 2 he once again came up with an unusual and absorbing drama, "The Time Element," in which William Bendix showed anew that he is a fine serious actor as well as a clown.

Mr. Serling's story was about a man visiting a psychiatrist. The patient complains of recurrent dreams in which he imagines he is living in Hawaii just before the attack on Pearl Harbor.

In a series of flashbacks the man is shown living with his knowledge of what has happened in the seventeen years since. He bets on sure winners in sports events, for example. But more particularly he seeks to warn a newly-married couple, newspaper editors and anyone else who will listen that they will be attacked by the Japanese. But everyone is either too interested in a good time or too determinedly patriotic to give heed; the man only gets punched on the jaw.

In a highly tricky ending the psychiatrist is left looking at a blank couch and to steady his own nerves he goes to a bar to get a drink. There he learns his patient was killed at Pearl Harbor.

The humor and sincerity of Mr. Serling's dialogue made "The Time Element" consistently entertaining.

Mr. Bendix gave a finely drawn interpretation of the troubled man with the dreams; his warmth and insight gave the enigmatic script a living dimension. Martin Balsam was fine as the psychiatrist, as was Jesse White as the bartender.