

Show triumphant at opener

By ETHEL SIMMONS

Vitality distinguishes the performance of a well-cast group of players in Agatha Christie's "The Mousetrap" at the Botsford Inn Dinner Theatre. The mystery thriller, presented by R. Deihl Productions, opened Thursday at the Coach House of the inn in Farmington Hills.

Despite an incredible array of opening night problems—including having to build the set in front of the audience—the actors appeared unflustered and enthusiastic.

Real troupers of the evening were the waitresses, who maintained professional aplomb, despite the din of hammers pounding on stage while the diners were served coffee.

AT TIMES, before the production began, you had the feeling of being among the last to go down with the Titanic. Theatergoers were hungry but plucky, as they waited patiently for

the late start of the buffet dinner and subsequently late curtain.

On stage, members of the company put up the walls for the sitting room of Monkswell Manor Guest House, an old English mansion being converted to a country place for paying guests.

Did they build a better mousetrap? Actually, the set of "The Mousetrap" was completed before dinner theatergoers went to the buffet table in the next room.

One of the set-builders explained to some of the people in the front that a meeting had been held in the room until 6 p.m.

The adequate selection of buffet food included fruit cup, salad and refreshments, beef stroganoff, fried chicken, green beans and miniature tarts.

When the buffet table was temporarily out of green beans, one woman was heard to say, "For \$13.50, I'll wait for them." There was a flurry when the dessert tarts were gone, but those were replenished, too.

Review

There were other problems. A line-up for five minutes at the door was quickly dispersed when it was discovered there was room inside and people were just bunched up near the door on the other side, enjoying their cocktails.

Only one waitress mixed the drinks and made change. A lot more cocktails and wine (available by the glass or bottle) could have been served if more help was available.

The arrangement of tables also was disappointing. Instead of the large, round tables used for the last show (performed by another production company), three long tables ran the length of the room, with diners jammed elbow to elbow on each side. A few round tables were at the rear of the room.

Near the front, a clear view of the stage was offered; diners in the back were not as lucky.

BUT THE SHOW went on. Janet Brooks portraying Mollie Ralston, whose aunt had left her Monkswell Manor, and John D. Elliott as Giles Ralston, Mollie's husband.

Ms. Brooks has a polished exterior that makes you think of these crisp English women. The bearded Elliott is proper and debonair.

As the guests arrive, you are gradually introduced to what becomes a household of eccentrics. First off, there's the young man who calls himself Christopher Wren and says he's an architect.

Sweated, frazzled-haired and bug-eyed, Wren as portrayed by Ron Deihl is a thorough delight. A fey character, he wants a room "with a four-poster and little chintz roses."

The other guests are the elderly and crotchety Mrs. Boyle, played with strength by Judy A. Privacky; Major Metcalf, tall and professorial looking, done with ease by Joseph F. Lempicki; the bold, bitchy traveler, Miss Caswell, aptly portrayed by Suzanne Fish; the mysterious Italian guest who appears out of the winter storm, Mr. Paravinci, an extravagant portrayal by Ronald J. Onulakowski.

THE ROLE OF Detective Sergeant Trotter, who skis over on police business, is handled in a down-to-earth manner by Daniel J. Fish.

Ingredients that made "The Mousetrap" an enormously successful whodunit on the English stage for an incredibly long run include suspense, that builds and peaks as a strange story unfolds.

It revolves around the strangulation of a woman at Longridge Farm. Years ago, three children had been sent by the court to the farm and were mistreated there.

A note by the body says, "Three Blind Mice," and indicates two more killings will occur. Slowly, we learn how the characters were involved and we-like they-try to guess who among them is the killer.

The setting of the play is the early 1940s, which adds another dimension of interest to the drama.

This was the only time I've ever guessed the killer successfully, and, of course, it's always who you least suspect. But just who is that? You know these mystery writers usually trip you up.

Gladys Knight first attraction

Gladys Knight and the Pips will be the first attraction of the fifth season at the Pine Knob Music Theatre in Clarkston, opening May 29 and also playing May 30 with performances at 8 p.m.

Jimmie Walker, young star of the TV series "Good Times," will appear on the program with Miss Knight. This will be Miss Knight's second appearance at Pine Knob. Her most recent personal appearance in Detroit

was for the opening of her movie "Pipe Dreams."

Gladys Knight and the Pips is a family function, with Detroit roots, for it features Miss Knight, her brother Merle and two cousins. They have been performing together for 22 years. Their awards are legend in the musical industry.

Young Jimmie Walker, 6-1 tall and weighing 130 pounds, received his first national TV exposure on the "Jack Parr Show." In October of



James Anderson and Mary Irvine portray Tommy Albright and Fiona MacLaren in "Brigadoon." (Staff photo by Steve Cantrell)

2 benefit nights for 'Brigadoon'

The skirl of bagpipes and songs with a special Scottish mood will be heard on stage at 8:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday at The Community House in Birmingham.

Two benefit performances of "Brigadoon" will be presented by Birmingham Musicals of the National and Michigan Federation of Music Clubs to provide funds for philanthropic and student scholarships activities of musicale.

Mrs. George H. Robinson of Bloomfield Hills and Mrs. Arthur R. Welton of Birmingham are co-chairpersons for the benefit performances.

The two-act musical "Brigadoon," with book and lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner and music by Frederick Loewe, is being given by Birmingham Musicals.

Opera Ensemble under the direction of Alice Engram of Birmingham and Oakland University, with production planned by Opera Ensemble chairman Mrs. Ted V. Linabury.

MUSIC ACCOMPANIMENT will feature Eleanor Whelan, pianist; Betty Hixon, percussionist; and Scottish bagpipers Greg Abbott and John Goodnow, along with Jerry Pierce.

The stage setting of the town of Brigadoon and MacConnachie Square has been designed by John and Judy Suhr of Birmingham. A former Birmingham resident, Catherine Jackson, now living in Florida, returned to design the costumes with the assistance of Eugenia Hawkins. Blanche Keener and Letta Stevenson.

Stage Manager is Mary Kassaban, who is being helped by Margaret Lane, Katie Walsh, Beverly O'Connell and David Beck. Makeup will be supervised by Kate Anderson, and Helen Smith is in charge of publicity.

Birmingham Musicals members will sing and act in the production along with other performers from the surrounding area. Mary Irvine is cast as Fiona MacLaren, Louise Smela as Meg Brodie and James Anderson as Tommy Albright. Clement Valente will be Charlie Dalrymple.

Further information may be obtained by calling co-chairperson Mrs. Arthur R. Welton at 644-4248.



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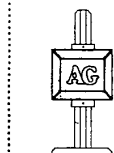
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