

Surroundings secondary to vivid portrayals

Thursday, January 26, 1978

(S-C, F, 17C, Ro-11B) (O)7D

By BARBARA MICHALS

Aided by an exceptionally strong cast, Will-O-Way Repertory Theatre's current production of "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" soars over its drab surroundings and conveys intense dramatic impact.

Though Will-O-Way patrons like to navigate over mountains of snow on the walk from the parking lot last weekend and contend with the theater's badly leaking roof and inadequate heating, the high-caliber performances and powerful storyline were well worth the trouble.

"One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" is Dale Wasserman's dramatization of the popular Ken Kesey novel. Set in a ward of a state mental hospital, the

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story works at many levels.

On the one hand, "Cuckoo's Nest" is an indictment of the sadistic staff that controls the hospital. The play also questions the nature of madness. The patients, a cross-section of all sorts of psychiatric ailments, seem to be the sane ones for having found an escape from the madness of the outside world.

THE DRAMA also deals with man's need for conformity and his need for gods and heroes. The ward's new

inmate, McMurphy, is a perpetual non-conformist and trouble-maker. Facing psychiatric problems as a means to evade a prison work farm, McMurphy expects the hospital to provide a life of ease and the patients to provide fat pickings for his gambling hustles.

As the outsider, he quickly grasps that the patients are being cruelly manipulated by the staff, and McMurphy starts to lead a rebellion in the ward.

His mind nullified by a venetian head nurse, McMurphy is eventually beaten by the system, a system too overwhelming for one sane man. On the other hand, McMurphy's spirit has triumphed, investing many of the other patients with a new sense of their self worth. McMurphy has become their god; they call on him for strength, betray him when the going gets rough.

The complex character McMurphy is both a Christ figure and a classic anti-hero.

John Willuz is a strong and convincing McMurphy, a dominant figure from the moment he walks on stage. This McMurphy seems more physical, more intense than the controlled rage of Jack Nicholson's memorable film portrayal, but Willuz is very effective in his own way.

MARLENE LOUCKS also does a fine job as Nurse Ratched, the sadistic, emasculating Big Nurse who runs the ward as her private fief. Ms. Loucks is appropriately cold, calculating, steeley.

Most of the time Steve Pyykkonen is convincing and touching as the towering Indian chief who fears he's too small to face the complexities of the white man's world. The chief pretends to be deaf and dumb rather than risk losing the little bit of self that's been left to him after the destruction of his ancestral tribe. The chief's solitary chats with his dead father provide the transition between the play's scenes. Here Pyykkonen occasionally lapses into the melodramatic, but the fault seems more in the lines than with the actor.

Harding, an older man hiding from the impotency caused by his wife's strong sensuality, and Billy, a young man who stutters in fear of his mother, are ideal victims for Nurse Ratched's emotional gristmill. Jack

Cortes and Mark DeFrais are outstanding as Harding and Billy respectively.

Tim Hall, his eyes glittering with madness, is memorable as the hallucinating Martini. Other supporting players who do excellent jobs are Mark Schilling, John Connolly, Lew Fraleigh, Jeff Nichols, Michael Eddy, Gary Hilsen and Gerry Woughter. They portray the other inmates who run the gamut of psychological disorders—paranoia, catatonia, delusions of grandeur, and mania.

Under the capable direction of Celia Merrill Turner, "Cuckoo's Nest" continues at Will-O-Way on Friday and Saturday evenings through Feb. 11. Curtain time is 8:30 p.m.

Jazz artists will perform

Chick Corea and Herbie Hancock will perform at 8 p.m. Thursday at Hill Auditorium on the University of Michigan campus in Ann Arbor.

Over the last decade Hancock and Corea have become two of the most influential musicians and bandleaders in modern jazz. Both are well known for their use of electronic instruments and fusion of rock into jazz improvisation. Although they have been criticized for their jazz-rock crossover, even their detractors acknowledge their contribution to the renewed popularity of jazz.

Corea-Hancock tickets are on sale at the Michigan Union Box Office in Ann Arbor and in Detroit at Cobb's Corner Bar. Seats are also available as part of the winter '78 Eclipse Jazz series which features Sam Rivers, Woody Shaw, Archie Shepp and Ella Fitzgerald. For more information call 783-1107.

Reservations phone number was incorrect

Reservations for the Theatre of the Arts Cocktail Playhouse dinner theater production of "A Thousand Clowns" and "The Boyfriend" are being taken at 649-0903. The phone number was incorrectly given in Monday's At Your Leisure column due to a typographical error.

"A Thousand Clowns" is being presented Thursdays and Sundays. "The Boyfriend" Fridays and Saturdays. Performances are at Alvaro's restaurant in Troy.

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