

Special affects helps Farmington Players' 'Bat' to fly

By HELEN ZUCKER

The Farmington Players production of Mary Roberts Rinehart and Avery Hopwood's "The Bat" belongs to technical consultant Bob Burton, craftsman for properties Cecil Orman, special effects crew Mary and Eddy Ellegood and Miriam Gillis, and most of all, to the lights crew.

Winton McColl, Ray Harrower, Jeanette Knapp and Gary Strong have a field day creating freak electrical blackouts, batman spotlights, floodlights, fading lights, candelights and flashlights.

A veritable canon of lights echoes from terraces, rooftops, attics, stairwells, fireplaces and hallways. It is the magic of the lightwork that moves the play along, whether the theater is plunged in darkness to the accompanying sounds of rolling thunder and screaming servants, or bathed in light to the accompanying intelligent lines of Miss Cornelia Van Gorder, who solves the "case of the missing bank funds."

The lucidity of daylight accompanies Cornelia whenever she enters a room.

Cornelia (Hope Nahstoll) is a maiden lady in her sixties who outfoxes everyone; she is a gracious lady with a good brain, a good income, a kind heart and much grace under pressure. Ms. Nahstoll is very believable as a lady who has taken the time in the country for a few months (Yes, Long Island used to be "the country.")

Ms. NAHSTOLL has the airy wave, the familiarity with servants, the sense of ease and trust in her own judgement that goes into the makeup of a woman like Cornelia Van Gorder. She oozes assured brains. She has a large vocabulary and relishes using it.

Ms. Nahstoll very nearly steals the play, but then Rinehart and Hopwood have given Cornelia all the good lines. Who can resist a lady who tells you indignantly, "Enemies are an indication of character!" Or that the walls in her house are "as hollow as Lizzy's head." (The Lizzy referred to is her maid and outspoken friend of 20 years.)

Cornelia's lines, though they are the best, are, alas, too few. Her delightful interview with Brooks, the new gardener, is too short. The gardener is in reality her niece's fiancé and the cashier falsely accused of taking the bank funds.

"How do you treat roses?" she asks the gardener, despondent. "Oh, you water it or something," the answer comes.

As Cornelia tries the soul of young Brooks (who has been to Harvard and never heard of roses, as plant or disease), the laughs come easily.

Brooks is played by Robert T. Moroch as none other than Dink Stover, our famous hero of yore who comes nobly through the fire to claim his love, reclaim his honesty and sweep all before him. As Dink, alias

Brooks, alias the bank robber who is not a robber, Moroch is pleasantly Yale. True blue. Four square.

BARRY NIXON wrings her hands a great deal as Dale Ogden, Cornelia's niece, the ingenue caught in the web of love, thievery, murder and assorted treacheries. She is fitfully anguished, pale and does not seem to own any clothing other than the satin dress and cape she spends the entire play in.

Has she come up from the city in them? Changed to go out with the doctor? Everyone else gets a crack at a bathrobe, a nightgown, shirtwaist, and in some cases, a black cape. Ms. Nixon makes it through the evening looking like a Vogue cover every inch of the way.

I do not want to commit the sin of giving the plot away. I will only say that John Knock as an Unknown Man is good. Ralph Rosati as Anderson, the detective, has some nice moments of banter with Ms. Nahstoll as Cornelia; they set up a nice man-woman bickering between them, but don't carry it as far as they could have.

Sharlun Douglas is funny as the beaupole maid, Lizzie-in-a-tizzy. She leaps about, sitting on hot water bottles, stubbing her toes, screaming threats and imprecations, the unfortunate soul who really sees what no one else manages to see: Namely, "The Bat" flitting about the house. She's in higher gear than the rest of the cast.

Hanmitzu "Taco" Akashi as Billy,

the Japanese houseboy, is funny and archaic. He looks like an escapee from a James Bond island where rich rogues still keep Japanese houseboys. STU ORMAN comes on a bit strong as Doctor Wells, but it's a strange, half-villain role. Gary Strong gives a good performance in a very brief appearance as Richard Fleming, dapper and does not seem to own any clothing other than the dead owner of the house. And Jim Benson as Reginald Beresford tromps staunchly about, waving revolvers and looking like a lost corporal from one of Rudyard Kipling's regiments.

The sets, as always, are first rate. The Farmington Players excel in set dressing and costumes; Don Briggs is well known for his set designs by now.

The pacing is too slow. The blocking, on opening night, needed work. A play like "The Bat" should be given to quick-witted timing, studied with abrupt stops, shocks, intakes of breath as the phone rings jarringly, or a body falls through the door. There is no room for heavy pauses in a work so slight it must juggle nine balls in the air all at once.

We should rush along from event to event during what amounts to a madcap night at a Long Island summer house. This is sheer entertainment and time for reflection is not needed.

"The Bat" isn't up to "Hay Fever," "Doll's House," or "Night of the Iguana," but the Farmington Players have high standards. The kids in the audience loved it, and lots of adults

joined in screams, laughs and gasps at the lighting effects. Directed by Perle Briggs and Ellie Jorgensen, produced by Eleanor Johnson, the production is

sheer batty relaxation.

"The Bat" runs through Friday-Sunday and May 18-20 at the Farmington Players Barn, 3232 Twelve Mile.

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Cranbrook museum receives painting

A large oil painting, "Sweet Daddy Grace," by Richard Yard, whose themes are drawn from the lives of legendary black heroes, has been presented to the Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum. It was given by the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, the nation's highest honor society in the arts.

The museum is one of 21 institutions to receive a painting from the Academy-Institute's Hassan and Speicher funds this year.

New York Times critic Hilton Kramer said, "What is unusual about Yard's paintings, given their theme, is the artist's willingness to grant the purely esthetic properties of the work a clear priority over its subject matter."

Yard was born in Boston in 1939, and received a master of fine arts from Boston University. He is presently resident artist at the Springfield Museum of Fine Art and visiting artist at the Massachusetts College of Art. From 1976-1977 he was visiting associate professor of art at Amherst College and associate professor of art at Wellesley College.

One-man exhibitions of his work were recently held at the University of Connecticut, Mead Art Gallery in Amherst, the Afro-American Center in Springfield, Mass., and the Jewett Art Center of Wellesley College. A traveling exhibit of his work, "Afro-American History: Public and Private," was held in 1975-1976.

Yard's paintings are in the permanent collections of many museums including the Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio; Museum of Fine Art, Springfield, Mass.; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Boston University; Fisk University, Nashville, Tenn.; and the National Center of Afro-American Artists. He has participated in many important group exhibitions including "American 1976," a

travelling exhibit sponsored by the Department of the Interior. In 1976 he won a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship grant in painting. His other awards include a prize from the Arcadia Foundation for Painting, a Blanche E. Colman award for travel and study in Nigeria and a faculty award for a sculpture project from Wellesley College.



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