

'Agape' needs more than love

By GEORGIA KUX
What, in these days of the '70s, is the state of love?

A few answers to this burning question are provided, both musically and poetically, in "Agape," a Student Enterprise Theatre presentation in the Barn Theatre at Oakland University.

The show has some appealing songs but its structure is often threadbare and needs a more recognizable weave.

"Agape," which draws its name from the Greek word for love, assures us, through the fresh eyes of youth, that love is just about the same as it ever was.

We know this, of course, but it's nice to be told in a succession of songs, a couple so lovely that you'll want to take them home in a jar for further pleasure.

WE HEAR ABOUT love from an ever-so-romantic couple, eyes in a Macdonald-Eddy lock, who warble about love's sweet inanities. Mike Sopotynski and Nancy Mahlin take the mushy stuff and make it effective.

A love-lonely woman, Ann Voorhees, keeps a Shakespeare sonnet to a wailing, abstract tune. The lush phrasings of the Song of Solomon add warm currents to the air.

We are reminded that love is not only for lovers but for family and friends. For kids: A pouting infant, in the pretty girl's body belong to Patri-

Review

cia Hick, bawls a very funny song of independence, "Leave Me Alone." A shining-faced schoolboy, played by the chirrupy Craig Sutsky, whines in the same song about his loving but demanding family.

Ballads of the hand-wringing variety cover the love-is-for-the-lonely aspect of "Agape." Here the singers, particularly the women, are suitably sorrowful in the lower registers. But their higher, sustained notes seem to teeter uncomfortably close to a bray.

Technically capable Nancy Bright avoids this pitfall in "If I Knew How to Love." The sound of sorrow is expressed more meaningfully in "After She Was Done Singing," the real-life story of a singer who died from an overdose of drugs.

THE MUSIC FOR "Agape" is by Darius Martus, a talented 24-year-old

alumnus of Oakland University now residing in Los Angeles. His lyrics, with a few exceptions, are the outgrowth of conversations bearing on various experiences of love.

Director Aston says the haunting "After She Was Done" has lyrics that are, almost word for word, the story related by a nurse on assignment to the hospital room in which former Supreme Flo Ballard died.

The company has some lively moments, "Yeah, Yeah, Ya Do, Yeah," in which they go happily bananas about this strange, crazy, dizzy feeling of love. And there's a South American beat to "Physical Attraction Is Just Superficial."

These scenes are among the few times the performers used their bodies effectively. Aston's quiet, geometric set affords little space for balletic shapes. But this is not necessarily what is needed. Theater is more than the face-in-the-box concept of television and bodies need to emote along with voices.

THREADED EXQUISITELY through "Agape" is the delicate prose and poetry of Tom Aston. Aston views "Agape" as a tapestry, a sensual experience. The audience senses and feels the structure of the play rather than being aware of the plot.

This concept works some of the time. We feel the textures of the music, the fine thread of reason behind love. "Agape" though is yet too nebulous in form.

Some of the songs appear more meaningful to the players than to the audience; sometimes we're mystified. And three good voices, Spanja Anita Moten, James Westery and Edwin Bonner, seem to be holding back, underplaying their emotional fires.

The world premiere musical will be presented Friday-Sunday. Special presentations for freshman orientation will be given July 6, 10, 17, 24, 27 and Aug. 14, 21 and 27.

"Agape" will reopen for a three-week run Sept. 8 at OU.

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