

'Sound of Music' heartwarming?

By GAY ZIEGER

"Sound of Music" is laden — yea, it verily drips — with sweetness. When the movie was released in 1965, every reviewer must have tried to avoid the hackneyed term "heartwarming," but, alas, it appeared again and again. That was 1965. The Rodgers and Hammerstein musical currently plays weekends through December at Will-O-Way Repertory Theatre in Bloomfield Township. But now we have a war, Watergate, an ayatollah and other assorted atrocities under our belts. We are sadder but wiser, more cynical, more sophisticated. Is this account of the Trapp Family Singers still the stuff Academy Awards

review

are made of? Maybe in a desire to return to simpler times (Nazi Austria?) contemporary audiences can embrace the soupy story, the slightly sappy music.

Maybe, but not without being predisposed to liking the performers.

THIS IS not to say that the crowd Friday night was composed solely of aunts and uncles. Far from it. But it was obvious that many of the people were friends of, or at least friendly

toward, the actors. It is possible that the cast members drew these feelings from them. The performers were likeable, they were involved, they tried. Some of them had good voices, some of them were quite natural. There were even some good moments.

If you have to listen to "Climb Every Mountain," you could do worse than to have it sung by Carol Jimmes. Her voice is unusually powerful, gently operatic. She was warmly personified, the kind of Mother Abess one would hope to find in all houses of God.

Ellen Weiss played her wayward postulate, whom she encourages to pursue the life God intended, whether it be as a nun or wife. Ms. Weiss was lively, though a bit too earnest at times.

The little catch in the throat was playing right into the hands of those who envisioned this story in the first place. She did, however, give every ounce of herself to it. She hugged and laughed and truly seemed filled with song.

HER PRESENTATION was joyous and helped give the evening some meaning. She exuded confidence.

Also on the joyous side was the effort put forth by the seven children. The casting was good. Each had a clear, fresh quality. The youngest, Cheryl Lerchen, and the oldest, Sara Chason, stood out.

Ms. Chason will someday have greater strength in her voice. Right now, you have to strain, but what you hear is pure and lyrical.

Ms. Lerchen has a funny little quality that is hard to describe. You almost can't take your eyes off her. She seems to be sharing an elusive joke with the audience.

The children's father, Captain Georg von Trapp, was played by the rather elegant-looking Jim Kruei. You want him to get the girl, and the fact that the girl is a would-be nun provides the only bit of raciness in the script.

HE HAS TWO notable moments. One is when he dances with Ms. Weiss and the strings of love become obvious, and then again when the emotion of the moment causes him to pause in the singing of "Edelweiss." That was by far the most dramatic moment.

Three other performers deserve mention here. Elaine Kleibert, as the almost-Mrs. von Trapp, has a decent voice and good facial expressions. Steve Pyykonen, as wheeler-dealer Max Detweiler, prances about the stage like it's his own living room.

And Lillian Rogender, as the housekeeper, has so much fun with her heavy accent and is so consistent with it that she brings forth smiles and admiration.



The singing von Trapp children are portrayed by (from left) Lori Poirier of Birmingham, Sara Chason of Farmington Hills, Krystyna Loucks of Bloomfield Hills, Jenny Rule of Bloomfield Hills, Kevin Loucks of Bloomfield Hills and Kevin Burrows of Birmingham.

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