Professional-man image suits actor

By ETHEL SIMMONS

Dressed in a conservative suit and vest, wearing spectacles and a pleasant, businesslike expression, Booth Colman looks more like a professional man — possibly a lawyer or doctor — than an actor.

But show business is his profession. And Colman heads the cast of "A Summer Remembered," a compelling drama by Charles Nolte, which will have its world premiere Thursday, Jan. 31 at Meadow Brook Theatre.

That's not to say Colman hasn't had his share of playing doctors, professors and such. His appearance and demeanor makes him a natural choice for these kinds of roles.

As a matter of fact, at Monday afternoon's interview in the Green Room of Meadow Brook Theatre, Colman mentioned that he would be seen that night on TV's "Lou Grant Show" in the role of a headmaster at a private school.

(The segment aired with Colman nicely filling the role of a spineless administrator who doesn't want to rock the boat or the school board).

Booth Colman is a doctor, again, in "A Summer Remembered," opening at Meadow Brook Theatre. (Staff photo by Dick Kelley)

THUS FAR Colman has managed to play doctors more than any other characters he has done on stage, on television and in the movies. "I've practiced obstetrics at Warner's and cardiology at 20th Century-Fox," he said.

In "A Summer Remembered," Colman plays "the father of the family, a doctor of medicine."

Terence Kilburn, Meadow Brook Theatre's artistic director, is directing the drama by Charles Nolte, who has had nine plays produced all over Europe and off-Broadway.

"A Summer Remembered" is set in 1938 at a summer home at a lake in Minnesota. "The play explores the personalities, the lives of a very nice American family," Colman said. "We know, of course, the war is going to change them."

He also commented on the set. "It's a marvelous set. It must rank as one of the best at Meadow Brook Theatre. It shows the outside of the house and lake."

Colman predicts the audience will empathize with the play's family, whom he compares to the Hardy family in the movies.

SOME OF COLMAN'S other doctor roles have included the doctor in the mill in the movie "Norma Rae" (for which Sally Field may get an Academy Award), the family friend of Rocky Marciano and his wife, who is the wife's doctor, in "I'll Get By," a movie for television; and Mrs. Walton's doctor on TV's "The Waltons" for a couple of segments.

"The mother Walton was ... get off the show," he said, amused. "She had consumption." Then she wanted to get back on, and ... Colman was called in a second time.

Perhaps his most unusual role was as a doctor on "The Planet of the Apes," for one TV season. "I was the intellectual leader. I was an orangutan," Colman said. "Roddy McDowall was a chimpanzee. He was my assistant."

Perhaps his most unusual role was as a doctor on 'The Planet of the Apes' for one TV season. 'I was the intellectual leader. I was an orangutan. Roddy McDowall was a chimpanzee. He was my assistant.'

— Actor Booth Colman

Colman said the show had a huge children's audience and not many plots geared to anyone over the age of 12.

His make-up took three hours every morning. "I had to be in my chair at 5 a.m. to be ready at 8," he recalled. "My make-up man was Frank Westmore, the last of the Westmores."

The veteran actor has appeared in 52 feature films (including TV and movies for TV) since going to Hollywood in 1951 to be in his first movie, Howard Hawks' "The Big Sky," which starred Kirk Douglas.

PRIOR TO THAT, from 1944 to 1951, Colman worked on the Broadway stage. His prestigious stage credits include appearing with Gertrude Lawrence in "Tonight at 8:30," directed by Noel Coward.

Not all Colman's roles have been nice guys. But he did have to think awhile when asked to recall any meanies he had played for the cameras.

"On 'The Untouchables' Ed Asner and I were brothers on three stories. We were a tough, Mafia family," Colman said.

One of his close friends for 20 years was comedy star Stan Laurel of Laurel and Hardy. Colman has some 250 letters he received from Laurel and is thinking of putting them into a small book.

Boris Karloff was another good friend; Karloff was a partner of Maurice Evans, when the Shakespearean actor starred in Broadway's longest run of "Hamlet."

Among Colman's favorite stage roles have been some of the ones he has done during six appearances over the last nine years at Meadow Brook.

WILLY LOMAN in "Death of a Salesman," Shylock in "The Merchant of Venice," Henry Drummond (Clarence Darrow) in "Inherit the Wind," Captain Queeg in "The Caine Mutiny Court-Martial" and Captain Wirz in "The Andersonville Trial."

"And this play also," he said, of his role as Dr. Washburn in "A Summer Remembered." He called the new opportunity "a challenge" and "uncharted territory."

Performances of "A Summer Remembered" will continue through Feb. 24 at the theater in Wilson Hall on the Oakland University campus near Rochester.

Village Players take it in style

review

By HELEN ZUCKER

The Birmingham Village Players production of George Kaufman and Moss Hart's 45-year-old comedy, "You Can't Take It With You" manages to convey the spirit and charm of a work that has miraculously survived World War II and the years and events following.

Nothing can destroy a truly funny line, and this play abounds in funny lines, situations and people.

In the comedy directed by James T. Robertson Jr., the bloom of innocent eccentricity still sits lightly on the Sycamore family and the man who supports them all, Grandpa Vanderhof.

Howard Beer is downright lovable as Martin Vanderhof, the man who dropped out of Wall Street "in time to enjoy things." The right things, in Grandpa's case, include visits to zoos, convincing the IRS that he "is dead" and need never pay income taxes, sauntering around the corner to take in the "terrible" commencement exercises at Columbia, going snake hunting, and keeping his shrewd wits about him when everyone else is losing theirs.

GRANDPA CONVERTS everyone who enters the house; Beer makes Vanderhof so cute and sensible that he's believable.

Debi Diehl is exuberant as Essie, the daughter who makes candy and loves to dance, despite the fact that her teacher, an immense Russian named Boris Kolenkhov, played by John hall, tells us emphatically: "She stinks!" (Ms. Diehl is quite a good dancer; alas, it shows, but we forgive her dexterity. A slip on the rug that kept moving under her might help.) The candy she makes looks suitably strange.

George Ransford as Ed, Essie's husband, looks totally eccentric. He's exactly right accompanying Essie on the xylophone, happily obsessed with printing, delivering candy with socialist handbills inside (he likes the letters; has no idea what the words mean) telling the IRS he "made two dollars and thirty-nine cents last year."

Don Jackson is a vigorous cockney who lives on relief. As the maid's boyfriend and live-in delivery boy, Jackson is obviously having fun in a part that uses his ability to move dexterously but doesn't really call on the talent Jackson possesses.

LINDSAY BALMER is bouncy, loud and energetic as Rheba, the maid. She serves cornflakes for dinner and, "Uh, maybe some kind of meat?" or sends round to the A & P when mealtimes roll round in this household where everyone does their own thing.

Paulette Slayden as the mother, Penelope Sycamore, saunters about worrying whether to "go back to my war play or take this character out of the monastery?"

She began writing plays when a typewriter was accidentally delivered eight years ago, and we know she will never stop, even tough the Russian says, "They stink!"

She paints too . . . "The Discus Thrower." What else?

Ms. Slayden's finest moment is the game-playing sequence; she looks truly wicked as she sets Mr. and Mrs. Kirby tilting against each other. Don Brown and Helen Shalvoy are good as the uptight Kirbys. They move from shock to loosening up at a realistic pace. Ms. Shalvoy looks wonderful, the soul of graciousness.

SCOTT CAMERON AS Mr. DePinna, who poses for The Discus Thrower, lumbers about the stage like a stray bear. As a live-in rocket inventor he's fine. He seems almost as incompetent as his partner, Paul Sycamore, played by Skip Pobst.

Pobst is the father who plays with Tinker Toys upstairs and fireworks down in the basement. Of course, the fireworks blow up at the appropriate moment.

Priscilla Sommers has the hardest role as Alice, the straight lady in the madhouse. She plays it like the normal neice in "The Munsters" — a smart move.

Don Schore is a handsome, likable Tony. Tony and Alice belong in the Vanderhof home even less than the elder Kirbys.

Joyce Clouthier is excellent in a cameo bit as Gay Wellington, a drunken actress. Ms. Clouthier even sleeps like a drunk. Terry Iverson is good as the confused IRS man who leaves his hat for Grandpa to keep. John Gilmore, Steve Wiseman, and Tom Kolodziej are funny as G-men.

THE BEST MOMENTS of the evening belong to Donna Snyder as the Baroness Olga. Ms. Snyder sweeps majestically onstage, announces: "I am most happy to be here. When is dinner?" then rises to cook it, exclaiming, "The Czar always said to me, Olga, do not be stingy with the blintzes!" with marvelous aplomb.

The Baroness is a waitress at Childs, filled with wonderfully ludicrous snobberies, and Ms. Snyder makes the most of a small but terrific role.

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Pianists revive jazz of past era

By JIM WINDELL

Whether the pianist is Bob Milne or Bob Seeley, the music goes on and the results are the same seven nights a week: Well-played jazz of another era.

"Mainly it's the music which interests people who come here," said steely haired piano wizard Bob Seeley.

"It's different and lively and gives Charley's Crab vibrancy. You can't find another place where our style of music is played."

Ever since Chuck Muer's Troy restaurant opened three years ago, the equally talented duo of Seeley and Milne has been entertaining at the piano bar with sounds that have basic roots in the period of American music prior to 1930.

BOTH MILNE AND Seeley are specialists of the blues, ragtime, stride and boogie that was so popular in the early part of the 20th century. While together they are perhaps Detroit's finest exponents of early jazz piano, each has his style.

The difference between the two?

Bob Milne answers without hesitation.

"Seeley is a tremendous boogie-woogie piano player. I can't compete with him. He is a fantastic technician and always very accurate."

Seeley responds more coyly:

"People say we play different, but I think we play in the same general bag."

Their "bag" is best summed up by the square-jawed, handsome Seeley.

"The style we play starts out right at the turn of the century with early Scott Joplin ragtime and goes through the 1920s and 30s and into the 40s.

WITH ASTOUNDING modesty Seeley said, "I play a little boogie-woogie."

Seeley is acknowledged by many experts to be one of this country's great practioners of the art of boogie-woogie piano. Whenever he plays Meade Lux Lewis' "Honky Tonk Train Blues," which he does frequently, it is evident that he plays a whale of a lot of boogie-woogie. He is a strong, sprawling pianist blessed with a monster left hand, an absolute necessity for a boogie-woogie player.

Bob Milne, a tall man with unruly dark hair is bashful. When he finishes a song, he glances around almost apologetically and looks as if he were about to be scolded. He seems to blush if someone at the piano bar talks to him, but get him talking and he is a wealth of information about early music.

RECENTLY, TWO WOMEN slipped into seats at his left elbow at the piano bar, and after Milne finished off "Palm Leaf Rag," one of the women remarked about hearing a ragtime number on the radio.

She thought it was by a female ragtime composer and the name, if she could remember it, may have been "Hosenpfeffer."

Milne instantly played the exact tune. He loped along gently with the ragtime melody, occasionally turning heads with a burst of chords or a changed tempo. After the tune, Milne gave the women a short history of female ragtime composers and piano players.

When someone across the piano bar requested "Memphis Blues." Milne joked he had never heard of it, and just as quickly was playing it. He gave "Memphis Blues" a sotto voce accompaniement and confided to the women at his elbow that the song was used in a political campaign in 1902.

He remembered a prettier ragtime song used for political campaign and jumped on that one, playing it through.

Both Milne and Seely play ragtime and play it as authentically as anyone. Milne just recorded his first album of ragtime and boogie tunes, some of which he has composed himself. That makes Milne one of the few writers of rags in American today.

Bob Milne (left) and Bob Seeley play blues, ragtime, stride and boogie, alternating as pianists at Charley's Crab in Troy.

SEELEY, IN A recent interview, talked about the old argument among ragtime players about whether ragtime should be played exactly as written. He leans toward putting somthing of himself into the rags he plays.

Milne says the same thing in another way: "When I start playing a piece, I don't know how I'm going to play it or how it will end up. I'm always missing notes."

Milne obviously doesn't take himself or his music too seriously, and in trying to explain why he plays old music, he said, "Life is serious enough when you have to worry about feeding and clothing a family."

Watching his counterpart play, you get the impression of a man who takes life very seriously. Seeley's expression is deadpan, if not stern, as he plays.

But when he's done with a tune and there is some applause or a nice comment from someone in the large crowd that gathers nightly in Charley's Crab, Seeley may break into a quick grin.

Bob Seeley started playing the piano at 13 when he was growing up in Redford and he heard his older brother playing the piano.

"My brother started sounding good on a couple of numbers and out of pure brotherly jealously, I decided I had to do the same thing."

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Improvisational Company needs practice

review

By GAY ZIEGER

Four months ago, Will-O-Way Apprentice Theatre of Bloomfield Township established an Improvisational Company to answer many requests for bringing talent to the people, as a touring group.

The improvisational group, directed by Celia Merrill Turner, has appeared at Schoolcraft College and before the Oakland County Judges' Association. It hopes to go to senior citizens groups, classrooms, libraries and wherever people want to learn about the workings of the theater. In this capacity, the group should be fine and should be en-

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