

Director finds plot a familiar one

When Liz Bishop was assigned the job of directing "The Petrified Forest" for Oakland Community College, she had no trouble relating to the story.

Robert E. Sherwood's Depression-era play about a French girl growing up in America matches Miss Bishop's own adolescence.

"The Petrified Forest" continues at OCC's Southeast Campus Theater on Center Street in Royal Oak. For ticket information, phone 548-1252.

"Sherwood placed the girl, Gabrielle, in Arizona," Ms. Bishop said, "and used France as a symbol of the faraway goal everybody longs for but can't attain."

In the play, Gabrielle gets her wish to rejoin her mother in France through the sacrifice of a traveler who leaves her his life insurance.

Many people remember Bette Davis as Gabrielle in the film reading the poems of Francois Villon to a dying Leslie Howard.

For the part of Gabrielle in the play

Ms. Bishop chose Oakland University freshman Lisa Craig of Royal Oak.

"LISA LOOKS just right for the role," Ms. Bishop said, "and as a trained singer, her voice was ideal for reciting Villon's poetry."

Herself a graduate of Oakland University, Ms. Bishop has read all of Villon's verse in the original French and she still speaks the language fluently.

"It was fun to see someone else act out situations that resembled my own life," she said. "In the play, the girl's parents divorce and she comes to America with her father. I came to America with my mother, so it's not exactly the same."

Nevertheless, lines that refer to brothers Gabrielle has never seen in France remind Ms. Bishop of her experience.

"When I was 23, I went back to France and saw my father. Sure enough, he had a wife separate family I had never met before," she said. "I was surprised because one of them

looked just like my brother Jean!"

Her brother, Jean Fleury of Birmingham, plays a small part in the play and her brother Jerry, also of Birmingham, tackles the role of Squier, the traveler who befriends Gabrielle. Not to be left out, her husband, Tom Kegel, is stage manager for the production.

THE GROUP of players produces about six plays a year at the Southeast Campus of OCC, where Kegel is the theater instructor. Last spring, in the musical "Cabaret," he pressed Ms. Bishop into the part of the emcee — a role usually played by a man.

"The part had all sorts of special requirements," Ms. Bishop remembers. "The emcee was supposed to be a little guy in a tuxedo who spoke several languages, twirled a baton and danced — all this in a gaudy white-face make-up. I wore a black wig and a mustache and half the audience thought it was a man."

Ms. Bishop is a professional mime in the daytime. As a member of the Mime Ensemble, she performed recently at The Community House and at Holy Name School in the role of Pinocchio. She also has had two of her own plays staged at the college.

What's next for this petite director and actress? Ms. Bishop is already working on another play weekends. She's putting 28 dancers through the numbers for "Hair" as choreographer.

The rock musical will be presented at the Royal Oak campus in April. Also in rehearsal are two new productions with the Mime Ensemble at Oakland University and more performances of "Pinocchio."

That doesn't leave much time for e-gramics or French cooking — a major disappointment to her husband, "Tom likes French dinners, but they take hours to prepare," Ms. Bishop explained, "so we eat a lot of Chinese food after work."

Facets ensemble presents 'Dark Solstice'

Stonehenge. Druids. "Morte d'Arthur." The writing of William Butler Yeats. All have associations with the word Celtic.

The Celts, an ancient people whose influence has echoed through the centuries, now are subject matter for an unusual theater piece "Dark Solstice," to be presented at 8 p.m. Feb. 28 at The University of Michigan's Power Center for the Performing Arts.

"Dark Solstice" is created by the Facets Performance Ensemble of Chicago, "A unique dramatic group in this

city," according to the Chicago Daily News. Compared to the early Pilobolus troupe, Facets is an "Avantgarde gymnastic team . . . (whose) movements have a mesmerizing force as they join and break apart in their configurations," the News said.

These visual qualities may be one reason European film directors have shown interest in Facets' work. Werner Herzog (director, "Nosferatu"), who says he normally despises theater, praises Facets. "I don't know any theater which has taken the development of

personal language so far . . ." Louis Malle, director of "Lacombe, Lucien," said.

NOT STRICTLY a mime performing group, Facets productions have both dialogue and vocal effects. "It is astonishing that a language like English could be so musical," French director Claude Chabrol remarked after seeing the company in Chicago. It's "a very impressive spectacle."

According to Mark Burk, a member

of Facets, "Dark Solstice" took about a year for the troupe to develop. Research included a trip to Brittany, France, to examine Celtic ruins there. The Celts were one of the earliest recorded cultures, possibly the first, and in "Dark Solstice" early man's response to major crisis is examined, he said.

For further information call the Professional Theatre Program Ticket Office at 784-9450. Special student and group rates are available.



Liz Bishop is directing "The Petrified Forest," which has reminders of her own adolescence.

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