

'Hold Me!' views this harried world, with bite

By ETHEL SIMMONS

sketches in "Hold Me!" a fast-moving evening's entertainment. The show, produced and presented through March 17 at the Birmingham Theater, making

Franklin Players offer dessert-theater show

By BARBARA MICHAELS

Two for the price of one. The current production of the Birmingham Theater of the Arts is a comedy and a tragedy. The William Gibson play is considerably more serious than the usual light hearted fare served up at most dinner theaters in the area. The drama is about two lonely people who drift together out of mutual need and then rise the seesaw of love until one eventually climbs off "seesaw" is not without humor, though its many comic moments are interspersed throughout and smoothly integrated into the whole. The opening scenes are particularly funny and warm as the two characters make tenta-

tive moves toward each other like moths drawn to the flame but fearful of getting burned.

GITTE is a kooky Bronx waitress with a genuine heart and a bleeding ulcer. Though her past experiences with men have left her the worse for wear, she can't resist taking in a stray in need of her warmth.

Jerry, newly arrived in New York from Nebraska, is fleeing a broken marriage and wrecked career. Feeling terribly isolated in the big city, he reaches out to Gittie. Jerry needs to be needed, and he's delighted to find that Gittie, despite her attempts at a tough exterior, needs looking after.

Kat Lattose does a fine job as Gittie, conveying both her tough-

ness and her vulnerability. She's endearing and amusing but never so kooky that one forgets to take her seriously. A touch of a Bronx accent sounds very natural.

In the final scene, those are real tears. Miss Lattose sheds, and her eyes look red and sore though they were normal just a few minutes before. It's an impressive achievement.

Hal Christiansen is a competent Jerry. His cynicism doesn't come across very well, possibly because Christiansen simply looks like too amiable a fellow to ever turn cynical. His delivery is always smooth.

Director D. Nell Harrison keeps the dialogue well-paced and utilizes the small stage as skillfully as possible.

the most of Tom Mula, Colleen Hudson and dancer Barbara Robertson to snark the Fettes.

Landsberg, who is a stand up comic as well as star on TV's "Barney Miller," plays Benjamin, a befuddled as plastic who lives on moon gazing. The performers had a relaxed, amiable presence, with strong voice projection that has machine gun impact.

Landsberg cruises across the stage when he's attired in some outlandish costume, such as a hipster who chews gum out, or briefly as a doctor wearing a white coat and stethoscope wickily swinging a sputum cup in a prop.

DIANA CANOVA, from TV's "Doogie," gets the best from her scenes that play on light-hearted drama. In the final scene, she talks to God, and in a light out bit, she and Landsberg are a couple who know how to take the fun out of sex.

Julius Fettes' world is one where "I" is more important than "you." In Fettes' world everyone has an agenda, or engages in self analysis to the satisfaction point. Good goals fall to petty weaknesses.

To put it another way, we are all terribly, terribly neurotic and need some

Review

body to "Hold Me!" provided we can get along long enough to make it work.

The show's lines are witty and snarky require concentration at times. They speak, like cartooned Fettes' comic strips, and are more to grin at than laugh uproariously.

Being neurotic is a theme that's somewhat overdone and passé, but Fettes has been gnawing at this bone with better humor ever since the concept was fresh.

THROUGHOUT THE show, cast members swing in and out a row of doors with electrifying regularity. Amazingly, they don't seem to forget their cues and jump into such other. The swinging doors keep the action hot.

The set, designed by director Berg, is basically the doors, with orange construction paper, pipes around them, topped by a neon sign that occasionally lights up the words "Hold Me."

On stage sequences take place amid alphabet blocks that become chairs, or what have you, while other props are moved. Interestingly these blocks are moved around but never spell anything out until, finally, H O L D M E !

All five cast members appear frequently throughout the show. Dancer Barbara Robertson, in black leotard and light, assumes her dances to the audience. Each "celebrates" a year, or aspect of life, and this elegant dancer takes fun at the dance as well as human failures in an engaging, refreshing way.

Tom Mula and Colleen Hudson both are versatile and polished, playing their characters with relish. Each succeeds in capturing the mood of Fettes and the tongue-in-cheek brightness that distinguishes a review from other kinds of performance.

Mula does a charming routine, tap

dancing Fred Astaire style, through life and his relationships. In another bit, he arrives with umbrellas which he then opens. "I'm your given up," he says, explaining he handles all the responsibility.

Ms Hudson has a elegant tone to her postprandials and is especially good in one where she and Landsberg, as blue party goers, turn their ghost faces off and on to suitably greet their "friends."

"Hold Me!" is the first show produced by the Birmingham Theater, which has decided to produce all its own shows from now on. It's a switch from the super expensive productions brought in during the first season.

Judging from this first show of the second season, "Hold Me!" the Birmingham Theater is on the right track, offering entertainment that is thought provoking, enjoyable and with good performance and credibility to boot.

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