Cast, audience warm up to Franklin's 'Mame'

By BARBARA MICHALS

Review

She may not have quite what it takes to "charm the husk right off of the corn" of "make the South rise again," but the Franklin Village Players' "Mame" is a thoroughly entertaining get nevertheless.

"Mame," is the unsinkable, cheerful musical (music by Jerome Lawrence, Robert E. Lee and Jerry Herman from the Patrick Dennis book Auntie Mame, Upson Down Under, Mame, Dear Mame, a Time Changes, and the little camp classic Gala Tide), on the premises.

Jeanne Austin Hunter is an upscale optimist who believes in sampling all the life she can. She is a bewildered parent, pleasure-loving and most generous of folks who are starting to death.

Young Patrick nearly orphaned at three at his Auntie Mame's New York apartment in the late 1920s and early 30s, adjusts to her madcap life style and nearly friends. They are expected for a time. Patrick goes to top of everything school while Mame travels around the world with his ashes in a bucket.

[illegible] Mame's friends are Agnes Gooch (Mame's family nurse and proper stickler). The girl is a bad family. Some time later she is playing the Pied Piper to Patrick's new young son, whisking him away into her zany world.

In the title role, Alice Brown is a likable, believable Mame, though not quite the larger than life screenplay has come to expect. Ms Brown's sing-ing voice is pleasant. Its effect added greatly to her twinkling eyes and pitch-less smile. Like some others in the cast, she started out slowly on opening night but soon warmed to the role.

The competent, spirited cast and some memorable singing by three principals do not a Mame make.

Peggy Hall is very pleasantly good as Agnes Gooch. Mame's family, acting and singing effectively. The girl is a bad [illegible] Agnes finally takes Mame's advice and sheds her shapeless dress and tatty pelle fashada for a flaming orange as the gown.

Kenneth McMurphy is outstanding as the young Patrick Dennis. At some moments young McMurphy seemed the most polished performer on the stage. The part requires singing as well as a good deal of dialogue, and McMurphy comes through like a real pro.

FABIOLA MAUTNER expropriates nicely enough as the portrayal of Vera Charles, Mame's boozy friend. Her Gabriel Vera is not as flashy as Jeanne as she might to be flashy, and some of her lines failed to get a response.

In supporting roles, Ron Wheeler is a handsome and charming Beauregard, Frank Cowick is amusingly stodgy as Junior Babcock, and Don Roberts is appealing as the older Patrick.

Playing Ito, Joe Dabla is endearing as the good natured and faithful Oriental houseboy.

As Mame's rival for Beauregard's affections, Helen Gregg oozes venom from beneath layers of feathers, furs in the part of Sally Cato. She's ably abetted by Rose Gadley's wooden Dolly Dupuyle. The Upson family, played by Gayle Miller, Walt Hoag and Paul Brown, are appropriately squeky.

The set for "Mame" complete mesh of the Jetsons and Jean Harlow designs are cleverly devised with a series of throw covers and lampshades. Bagelands are a bit too visible, though, at times popping up from behind the stage and shedding every the most willing suspension of disbelief. Costumes for the show are colorful and well suited to the period.

The Franklin Village Players are presenting "Mame" in an unusual theater format. At intermission, friendly cast members serve pastry and coffee, tea or punch to the audience seating in cabaret style.

"Mame" continues Friday and Saturday, March 30 and April 1, at the Pony Pony Theater, located in Frank Lloyd Wright's School in Franklin Village. A reservation has been added for Sunday, April 1.

'Paper star' adds Thursday show

[illegible]

[illegible] performance of the show. Note the third performance.

The added performance will be Thursday, March 29, at 8:30 p.m. in the Studio Theater at Cranbrook School on Lone Pine Road, Bloomfield Hills. For advance ticket information, call 337-5000.

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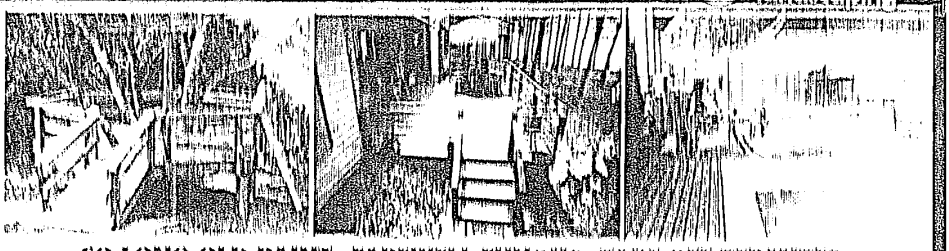

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