

'Yum-Yum Tree' makes delightful dinner show

By JODY A. CUMMINGS

review

Jimmy Launce's production of Lawrence Roman's "Under the Yum-Yum Tree" could charm even the staunchest dinner theater critic.

The play, which opened Friday will continue to run Friday and Saturday nights through Aug. 23. Performances are held in the lower level of Somerset Mall in Troy.

The auditorium is small and intimate, enhancing the enjoyment of the good food and entertainment.

"Under the Yum-Yum Tree" concerns Robin Austin (Liz Denison), a young woman who takes over her aunt's apartment when the older woman

decides to leave for Sacramento to teach. Robin invites her boyfriend, Dave Manning (Fred Buchalter), to move in with her on the condition that the relationship be kept strictly platonic during his stay.

ROBIN'S AUNT Irene (JoAnn Tyler) reluctantly agrees to the arrangement, hoping Robin will protect her niece from the rather lecherous landlord, Hogan (Mark Halpin).

Director Hal Youngblood has updated this 20-year-old play, giving it a freshness and contemporary flair that is essential to its success.

Youngblood masterfully blocked the show on a tiny stage.

As Robin, Liz Denison lends credibility to what is still a largely outdated role. As the college-age woman-child, torn between her morals and desires, Ms. Denison is at once innocent and sensual, playing at times both seductress and schoolgirl.

She is light and breezy, portraying her role with a believability that could easily be found lacking in the hands of a less competent actress.

JOANN TYLER gets off to a slow start as Irene, appearing slightly uncomfortable in front of an audience, and at times seems to be reading her lines directly from the script. During the second act, however, she sparkles with new life and animation. Her lines are more emotional, and Ms. Tyler delivers them with zest and vitality.

Her best scene is a confrontation with Hogan, and one almost feels like applauding when she finally tells the landlord what she really thinks of him.

As Dave Manning, the handsome straight man, Fred Buchalter has done a very good job with a fairly difficult role. Caught in the middle of intra-character conflicts, he must also struggle with his own.

He is at his best when he is arguing with Hogan. These quarrels are done

with great celerity, each man firing a barrage of insults and inquiries in rapid succession.

The indisputable highlight of the show is Mark Halpin as the lascivious Hogan. His comedic timing is impeccable, his actions and facial expressions hilarious.

He is a wonderfully likable anti-hero, wooing people into his confidence with false indignities and urbanity. Halpin is often the one who keeps the pace flowing and the action smooth.

Alex Kallao Trio plays for dancers

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Pianist Kallao has long been a prominent name in Detroit's music circles. His father was a professional pianist before Alex came on the scene as a child prodigy.

Kallao's career has brought him through classics and jazz to the point where he mixes a blend of musical styles.

Bass guitarist Al Gabor and drummer Ed Marz assist Kallao. The Alex Kallao Trio continues through Aug. 30 at Top of the Pontch in downtown Detroit.

Music begins at 8 p.m. Tuesdays-Thursdays and 8:30 p.m. Fridays-Saturdays.

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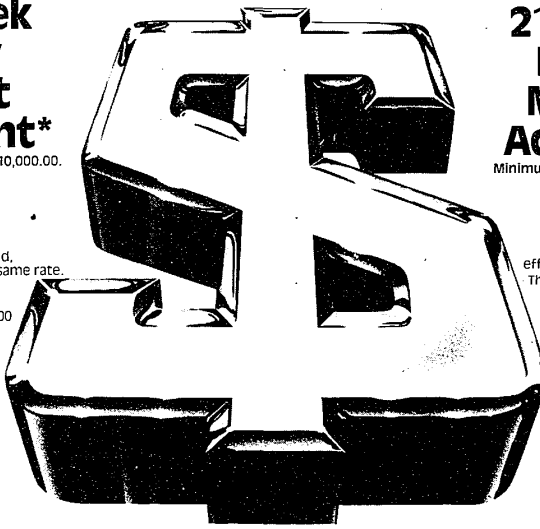
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