

Comedy needs more witchery

By HELEN ZUCKER

review

The Farmington Players production of Christopher Fry's witty comedy "The Lady's Not for Burning" is uneven and flit. Fry's grandiloquent verse may have had its day.

Perhaps only Gellig, Olivier and their ilk, lending their own special brand of sophistication and passionate wit to this rather empty, "intelligence-sounding" play, could make it take flight.

Performances continue at 8:30 p.m. Friday-Saturday at the Farmington Players' Barn, 2454 Glen Orchard Drive at 12 Mile Road, Farmington Hills.

Director Hope Nahstoll is very good as Margaret Devise, mother of Nicholas and Humphrey, the fighting brothers. Ms. Nahstoll's brisk concern with everyday affairs, her total lack of attempts at rhapsodic flights of speech were a refreshing point to fix on.

Ms. Nahstoll portrayed a lady in charge of the mayor's household, I found the lending of Margaret Devise's bridal jewels and clothing to a witch bound for the stake unbelievable, but the fault lies in Fry's script, not in Ms. Nahstoll's performance.

THOMAS DOUGALL, an experienced actor working on a half a cylinder, manages to wring a few laughs out of his role as a justice who likes to live comfortably. As Edward Tappercom, the judge who would like to move into the wealthy witch's house, Dougall takes over the stage the moment he appears.

Falling into a sweet, slightly drunken state, Tappercom, who is no fool, opens the window and lets the witch and her suicidal lover escape into the dawn. Dougall moves about in his heavy robes with easy authority. His Tappercom doesn't believe in witches at all; he's a thoroughly worldly roue.

lusioned soldier into passionate love.

Ms. Jourdemayne gives us a schoolteacher's version of "rational beliefs vs. irrational beliefs." We get specifying, not magic, from Ms. Jourdemayne will unbend and light a fire in her role.

At present, the witchery is missing, and I suspect the fault lies largely with Fry, who has written up a rather unbelievable witch.

C.M. NOVESS III gives his all as Thomas Mendip, the discharged soldier who wants to be hung. I suspect Novess is capable of good acting, and he has a few fine moments, usually when he is talking to himself at the window.

But Novess never quite hits the depths of suicidal rage the part calls for. We never really believe he is capable of desperate murder. He is, as we find out at the finale, "a gentleman of good breeding," an intelligent soul who saves his witch.

Novess never seems quite fed up with the world really. He demands to

"be hung," with cheery relish rather than angry despair. Perhaps the weather will drive Novess into the proper stage of mind this weekend.

David McCabe justly deserved the spontaneous burst of applause he got for his too brief appearance as Matthew Skips, the "dead" rag and bone man. McCabe is a wonderful 15th century drunk, the only member of the cast with an accent that sounds small-town, lower-class Chaucerian Cockney.

Mike Rentzack and Mark Honeyman are fairly alive as the competing brothers, Nicholas and Humphrey. They thump each other about with brotherly hatred. George Martin is a sweet, if monotone, chaplain. Martin is a bit too matter-of-fact in a role that calls for other worldly dimensions.

IN FAIRNESS to all the actors and their heavy costumes, I wish them less torrid temperatures.

Lights by Dina Zemke are fine. The set by Mary Cole, Terry Brown, Kathy Nebs and Dina Zemke is exceptional.

Musical readied

The Birmingham Theatre has closed its doors in preparation for the next production, "Do Black Patent Leather Shoes Really Reflect Up?"

The musical comedy, based on John Powers' best-selling novel of the same name, has been breaking attendance records in Chicago for more than a year.

The Nederlanders also will open the production on Broadway later this fall. "Patent Leather Shoes" will preview Sept. 5-7 and officially open Sept. 9.

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