

楽しいお食事は京都へ

'Miracle' shines without sentimentality

review

By HELEN ZUCKER

The Will-O-Way Repertory Theatre production of "The Miracle Worker" is stunning.

Director Celia Merrill Turner understands the difficulty and the art of teaching, and she has poured everything she knows into this production of the famous Anne Sullivan/Helen Keller teacher/pupil battle.

"Miracle Worker" runs Fridays-Saturdays through Oct. 18 at Will-O-Way Repertory Theatre, 775 W. Long Lake Road, Bloomfield Township.

Will-O-Way has surpassed itself with this disciplined, beautifully paced rendition of William Gibson's shrewd, moving play. There isn't an ounce of sentimentality in this tough production, and there wasn't a dry eye in the house at the finale of Saturday night's performance.

A FULL MINUTE of silence — the best tribute actors can hope to receive — before a burst of applause ended the evening.

The lead actress, 12-year-old Gretchen Kramp, spent the entire summer preparing for the role of Helen Keller, and her total dedication shows in every scene. I have never seen so young an actress with such superb control.

Ms. Kramp is an extraordinarily gifted actress; she fills the stage with magical intensity. I believed she was a spoiled, deaf, mute, wild child. I also believed in her terrible will, the power that allowed her to turn a household of intelligent adults into harassed, docile souls who will do anything for the sake of peace.

Ms. Kramp focuses quite rightly on Helen Keller's frustrated will to know, and her performance is a beautifully executed series of shifts from destructive will to constructive will.

Ms. Kramp is endearing in the final scene; she doesn't leap about in triumph. She's excited but rather humble when she makes the great leap into language. Her face lights up swiftly when she connects "water" with the word. She wants immediately to know how to spell everything else in sight, but she also wants to thank her parents and the teacher whose love and expertise have made it possible.

EILEEN T. WEISS is marvelous as Anne Sullivan, the 20-year-old teacher with a will that proves stronger than her pupil's. Ms. Weiss drops her key line, "I've got nowhere else to go and nothing else to do," with just the right mixture of spunky irony and bald fact.

She is haunted by dreams of her little brother who died in the state home Anne lived in until she was sent to the Perkins Institution for the Blind, so we learn the cause of Ms. Sullivan's will to succeed quickly with Helen.

Feeling responsible for her dead brother, Anne shifts her deep sense of responsibility to Helen. Quick-witted, hard-working, inventive, Anne Sullivan was the right force in the right place at the right time.

Ms. Weiss gives us all this and more. She's brilliant in the dining room scene when she throws everyone out, locks the door, and literally fast, fights her wild pupil into learning to eat with a spoon from her own plate.

"The room's a wreck," Anne says wearily to Mrs. Keller when she emerges, "but Helen folded her napkin." Ms. Weiss is bottled intensity, she turns in the performance of her life. And she speaks with a clear Boston brogue, never missing an accent beat throughout.

ELAINE KEINERT excels as Kate, Helen's mother. The first to recognize Helen's blindness, she is also the first to recognize what "folded her napkin" means. A soft-hearted, motherly woman, she fights her own instincts and sometimes her husband to help her daughter.

Ms. Keinert gives us a portrait of an honest woman who finds parenting tough going but who stays in the ring.

Robert Rucker as harassed Captain Keller, a newspaper editor who can never hold a conversation at home because of his daughter, turns in a complete performance. Satisfied with Helen at the point where she has learned to eat quietly, he wants to fire Annie.

Rucker gives us a man with too much on his mind. He's not as good at the parenting business as his wife, and he learns that at the end.

Steve Longmuir is super as Helen's half-brother, James. Longmuir grows believably from a mean, sarcastic kid to Annie's chief supporter. We believe in his intelligence and Longmuir's best scene — when he finally stands up to his father — is filled with energy.

James has Oedipal conflicts to work out with Kate, his father's second wife, as a subplot in this complex play, and Longmuir does a nice job of it. Kate and James wind up friends.

GEORGE MARTIN is lovable as Anagnos, head of the school that has

trained Annie and restored her sight. Josh Dawson is poignant as Annie's crippled brother who appears, walling, in her dreams.

Dawson seems to have stepped out of a Dickensian workhouse, and the atmosphere he creates in the eerie light is a true depiction of soulless institutions everywhere.

Marlene Locks is excellent as Aunt Ex; love wins out over snobbery in this true Southern lady. Richard Blanchard gives us a kindly, ignorant doctor. Rudy Markham is very lively as Percy, Helen's playmate.

Lisa and Tiska Markham, twin sisters who play servant's children and playmates, are very effective in the opening scene.

'She Loves Me' opening run

"She Loves Me," a romantic musical by the authors of "Fiddler on the Roof," opens the Wayne State University Studio Theatre season Oct. 15 in Detroit. The show will continue for two weeks, Wednesdays-Saturdays through Oct. 23.

"She Loves Me" will be presented at 8:30 p.m. Oct. 15-18, 22-25 and at 4:30 p.m. Oct. 23 in the Studio Theatre, downstairs at the Hilberry Theatre, Cass and Hancock.

Tickets are available at the Wayne State University Theatre Box Office, Cass and Hancock (577-2972), and at most Detroit area colleges and universities.

"She Loves Me" by Joe Masteroff, Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick, revolves around Maracek's Parfumerie, an elegant boutique in a European city at the turn of the century, and the clerks who work there.

George Nowack, the senior clerk, and Amalia Balash, a new employee, are both warm-hearted and well-liked people, but they cannot seem to get along.

GEORGE BICKERS with Amalia about being late, and Amalia responds by criticizing George's socks and ties. George and Amalia each have some-

thing wonderful to look forward to after work: the latest letters from their unknown lonely-hearts correspondents.

What neither George nor Amalia knows is that they are exchanging letters with each other. The development of their relationship is marked with gentle humor and delicate romance in "She Loves Me."



'She Loves Me,' a romantic musical, stars (from left) Marc Ciolekajlo of Detroit as George Nowack, Jennifer Roberts of Farmington Hills as Amalia Balash and Phillip W. Moss of Flat Rock as Sips.

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