

# Humanity envelops drama 'Our Town'

By KATHRYN PARSONS

Meadow Brook Theatre has staged an impeccable and compelling performance of "Our Town." Under the direction of Edward Kaye-Martin, Thornton Wilder's play flourishes.

Spanning 14 years in the domestic lives of two New England families at the beginning of this century, the play opens a chink on humanity. Without exception, the actors describe the lineaments of the characters they play with discreet eloquence and wit.

"Our Town" runs through Nov. 30 on the Oakland University campus near Rochester.

HERE WE WITNESS life in Grovers Corners, N.H.: in the kitchen, in the street, in the church yard and the church. Each scene ostensibly dramatizes the homely ceremonies of simple people. Yet each is illuminated by a sense of the eternal.

By Wilder's own design, the stage set is frugal to the point of being barren. Two tables, a handful of chairs, two ladders and two arbors, studded about, comprise the whole.

Elocution is enough, Stage Manager Peter Brandon sketching in the rest: the essentials of time, place and local color; the angle of the sun and the smells of a summer evening.

The actors fill in for missing cups and milk jugs with skillful miming. The impact of such intentional invisibility is to create a sense of timelessness.

OTHER THEATRICAL devices in "Our Town" contribute to this. The characters at times remain unseen, their voices floating suggestively across the empty stage. Or, from time to time, they may step outside the action for a moment. The tableau, frozen behind them, throws their figures and sentiments into expressive relief.

As Stage Manager, Brandon gives full play to the nuances of his role. He weaves through Wilder's system of reality and illusion with the paternalistic warmth and savvy of an experienced guide.

With subtle irony, he appears to collaborate with the playwright on the

## review

supposed simplicity of the play. He summons and dismisses players with such an ease, we are sure it is his play, while at the same time, we know by the script he so ostentatiously refers to from time to time that the real author is offstage somewhere dreaming.

This adds to the hint that life is but a repeating pattern in "Our Town," and to the haunting sequence of events which exist both inside and outside of time.

In an effort to inform the audience, the Stage Manager calls on Professor Willard to provide some sociological history of Grovers Corners. Bob Murdy gives a sprightly portrait of the academician whose enthusiasm for his subject borders on the absurd.

RON SEK IS restrained and graceful as Dr. Gibbs, an earnest country physician married to the more imaginative Mrs. Gibbs. In this part, Jeanne Arnold frees her role from any apparent narrowness.

A.B. Cover plays Mr. Webb, Grovers Corners' newspaper editor, with a sparkling intelligence. He balances wit with sentiment. As his counterpart tally, she comes forward out of the wedding scene to tell us what she thinks of the custom, a delightful streak of rebellion in her voice.

The children carry the action of the play forward with a winsome solemnity.

In the character of George Gibbs, Stanley Flood has all the painfully awkward gestures and speech mannerisms of the archetypal adolescent. His flight toward maturity is attended by both a compulsive honesty and charm. He manages with great naturalness to fall in love with Emily Webb over a strawberry ice cream soda without lapsing into sentimentality.

As Emily, Judith McIntyre lightens

her part with an ingenuous vitality. She captures beautifully the precocious gravity of a young girl on the brink of awareness.

IN THE FINAL act, while the dead sit upright on chairs clustered to stage left, we see Emily Webb's funeral procession and Emily herself gliding in a white gown toward her seat next to Mrs. Gibbs. Ms. McIntyre has surpassing grace here and in the following sequence when, choosing to relive her 12th birthday, she discovers life's sad duplicity. This is the poet's vision and Wilder's meaning, no doubt, when he decided to set "the life of the village against the life of the stars."

There are many sprightly bit parts in "Our Town" which add both dimension and character to the play.

As the milkman Howie Newsome, Tom Mahard doffs his cap, talks to his invisible horse and offers his opinions on the weather with a perfect nonchalance.

Donald Ewer plays the alcoholic organist Simon Stimson, both alive and later from the grave, with an acerbic temper.



Poking fun

'Gonzo Theatre' takes a jab at what's going on in metro Detroit when the musical satire opens Friday at Stouffer's Showcase in the Northland Inn, Southfield. The Southfield Repertory Theatre production features (from left) pianist Marlene Loucks, stand-in

Kelley Crowley, Beth Hallo, Hal Doyle, Ralph Valatka and David Turrentine. The new dinner theater, in the old Grogshop, will run every Friday and Saturday, with dinner at 7:30 p.m. and show at 9. For reservations call 569-4700. (Photo by Tom Treuter)

## Film focuses on Netherlands

"The Netherlands" comes to life on screen in a color travel film at 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday at The Community House, Bates and Townsend, Birmingham.

Tickets are available in advance at The Community House. For further information call 644-8333. Parking is adjacent to the building.

Russ Potter will narrate the arduous journey to Amsterdam to discover Holland's huge diamond cutting industry and the mining process in obtaining these fine gems.

A boat ride through Amsterdam's canals stops to visit the interesting house of Ann Frank; the Modern Art Museum — home of numerous, valuable Rembrandt and Van Gogh paintings — and the unique housing along the canals.

THE SAME canals provide some of the world's largest and longest skating rinks in the winter. Thousands of people from tiny tots to those in their 80s and 90s are found enjoying ice skating, for sport, pleasure and as a means of transportation.

Winter in the Netherlands would not be complete without a visit from Santa Claus, and the feast of Sinterklaas (as it is called there) shares this festive time with viewers through the camera of Ross Potter.

With springtime, the coastal resort of Scheveningen comes to life, and the audience will see fishermen with hun-

dreds of nets go to sea for the fresh catch of the day.

Spring also means tulip-time in the Netherlands. Viewers will visit the Deukenhof Gardens, world renowned for its multi-color spectacle of thousands and thousands of tulips in bloom.

Harvesting tulip bulbs for export at the City of Aalsmeer brings exporters from all corners of Europe to participate in this major auction of bulbs.

ALSO ON the travel agenda is Friesland, dairyland of the Netherlands. Here a weekly cheese market provides buyers with the famous Edam and Gouda cheeses, plus numerous others. In the nearby town of Alkmaar, home of the Holstein cattle, the audience will

watch as Princess Beatrix pays a visit to the annual parade of antique boats in the small community.

The city of Delft, home of the famous Delft Ware, Rotterdam, the world's greatest harbor, Utrecht, the city of ancient and modern contrasts; and Hoorn, harbor of the golden age of the 17th century, are among many other places included in Russ Potter's visual journey.

Dinner is served by reservation only, from 6 p.m. Dinner is priced at \$10.50 per person, including tax and service.

For further information on the travel film series, interested persons should call The Community House at 644-8332.

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