

# OU production captures Southerners' 'obsession'

By HELEN ZUCKER

"A Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" isn't one of Tennessee Williams' best plays. Nonetheless fine moments abound in this work, and Student Enterprise Theatre production at Oakland University manages to infuse great vitality into Williams' script.

Director William McCarty has gotten the most out of his good cast. The actors manage to capture the mad Southern obsession with "purity" of various kinds. Performances continue Friday-Sunday and Nov. 21-23 at the Barn Theatre on campus near Rochester. Curtain time is 8:30 p.m., except Sundays at 2:30 and 6:30.

Catherine Sabanos turns in a superb performance as Big Mama. Ms. Sabanos is beyond being "southern." She passes into the region of believable wife to a dying man and suffering mother of an alcoholic son.

MS. SABANOS never gives way to melodrama in a part that would send most actresses over the cliff. She carries off her overwrought lines with great delicacy. Big Mama is supposed to be a crude lady, but I liked Ms. Sabanos leaving all the crudeness to Big Daddy.

## review

Jerry Backl, who looks like Burl Ives' brother, is wonderfully energetic as Big Daddy, the poor boy who now owns "the largest plantation, the richest land in the Mississippi delta." Backl looks as if he has worked hard enough to learn "10 million dollars," he gives the impression that he has probably destroyed at least 10 people while enlarging his lands.

Backl is a shrewd enough actor to convey the intelligence, the animal savvy of Big Daddy, the sacred male bond Big Daddy has with his favorite son, Brick.

We're supposed to love Big Daddy for his vitality, his crudeness, his creepy attitude toward women. He decides he likes Maggie because she's good in bed, and she promises to give Brick a son to inherit the olde manse.

I didn't believe Big Daddy's fit of sensitivity toward the Arab woman and her child while he tells Brick about his cook's tour of Europe. This is a flaw in the script, not in Backl's performance. Big Daddy is a southern redneck to the

hilt, and Backl has powerful moments conveying the surprising complications of the Redneck mentality.

KRISTY CARDINAL is an itchy, desperate, sexy Maggie. Like Big Daddy, she's a fighter. Ms. Cardinal conveys Maggie's anxiety, her desire to wake Brick out of his stupor, her unreasonable love.

"I don't have the charm of the defeated," and, "I wish you'd lose your good looks so it would make the martyrdom of St. Maggie more bearable." Ms. Cardinal says with great intensity. Maggie is really Big Daddy's match, not Brick's, and by the end of the play we know that the old manse is going to

its rightful heir, Maggie. Dwayne Foster has a hard role as a silent drunk waiting for "the click" in his head. He listens politely to tirade after tirade from wife, father and everyone who walks into his bedroom.

Foster is very good when he finally gets a chance at some action: swinging at Maggie with his crutch, trying to explain his "pure attachment" to his dead friend, blathering about "mendacity," when he means he has betrayed his friend, his wife, and his conception of himself as a football hero.

Noble southern gentlemen are generally tiresome characters. Foster manages to make a lot out of a cliché; he isn't tiresome at all in the role of a col-

lege hero who dreads growing up, admitting defeats, and the onslaught of time.

DEBRA ANN NAPOLEON and Louis S. Daber are fine as Mae and Cooper, "the breeders," the couple with five "no-neck monsters," and a sixth on the way. They do their best in very stereotyped roles; the conventional, corporate lawyer, older brother and his wife, bent on inheriting Big Daddy's holdings.

As Williams wrote the parts, they're drips who deserve nothing, and apparently that's what they get. Seems a bit much, since Cooper's been looking after all those holdings, but in this play drinks and O' Miss prom queens inher-

it the earth. I wouldn't give all that rich land to any of these people.

Joyce Lindbloom, Karen Lindbloom, Denie Rice and Kristopher Burridge, as Dixie, Trixie, Pilly and Sonny, are terrifically obnoxious. Big Daddy and Maggie aren't the only ones who detest these kids. The moment they broke into hypocritical "sweet" songs and fired their cap pistols I wanted to throw them out of the theater. Nice going, kids.

Dave Clines is competent as Doc Baugh, and Gregory A. Rittinger is a cute, dense Reverend Tooker.

The set by Thomas Aston and student assistant Janet Marie Cheff, is clever and workable. I liked all the the doors.



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