

Winning streak goes on with 'Man of La Mancha'

By HELEN ZUCKER

The N.Y. Drama Critics' Circle Award Best Musical of 1966, "Man of La Mancha," sounds even better in 1980.

Dale Wasserman's original work, loosely based on Cervantes' spoof on chivalry, "Don Quixote," will probably be as enjoyable — in the right hands — in the year 2,000 as it is now.

Mitch Leigh's music and Joe Darrow's lyrics are in the right hands in the Will-O-Way Repertory Theatre production of "Man of La Mancha." Brilliantly directed by Celia Merrill Turner (who seem to be on a winning streak this season) and associate director Eileen T. Weiss, "Man of La Mancha" is an evening of powerful, highly imaginative theater.

"Man of La Mancha" continues at 8:30 p.m. Friday-Saturday and Dec. 12-13, 19:20 at Apprentice Theatre at Long Lake and Telegraph in Bloomfield Township.

MELVYN HARDIMAN delivers his

key line, "Facts are the enemy of truth," with total understanding. Hardiman's sure grasp on the difficult role of Don Quixote, the lovely mixture of madness, poetry and a sane, humane outlook on benighted humanity make this production one of Will-O-Way's most memorable.

Hardiman has a magnificent voice. I got shivers down my spine listening to Hardiman sing "The Impossible Dream." Whether speaking or singing, Hardiman is totally convincing as the "Knight Errant" who "misadventures" through the country side and lands in jail.

He's especially good in the "Aldonza" number, his persistence in believing Aldonza is his "pure lady Dulcinea" carries us past the absurd into the realm of truth. Hardiman pulses with conviction, and his shining honesty literally transforms Aldonza.

Maria Foster turns in a strong performance as Aldonza. Ms. Foster's mobile face conveys the bitterness agitated by an illiterate kitchen scullion introduced to ideas of gentleness and

goodness. Ms. Foster moves like a contained tiger, and she shines in the difficult "Aldonza" number.

We believe she is Dulcinea at heart, despite the rough treatment she gets from the muleteers and life in general. Ms. Foster is a good actress, and her soprano is sweet stuff.

I DON'T BELIEVE I have ever called a male actor "enchanted," but there is no better word to describe Richard T. Williams' fine performance as Sancho. Quick, willing, loyal to the bone, Williams is utterly endearing as the "Squire" who finds himself facing the inquisition with his "Knight."

When Williams shrugs, searches for an answer to Aldonza's question, "Why do you follow him?" and finally sings "I Really Like Him," all I could think of was how very much I liked Williams.

He gives us a Sancho who is forever hoping about, alert to realities, alive to romance. Williams turns in a fully realized performance.

George Martin is a sweet Innkeeper and a competent Governor of the Prison. Martin gets better with every role he takes on. Duncan Hurley, as The Padre, sings the Latin finale well,

review

and he delivers his lines clearly. Richard Fielding is suitably villainous as the materialistic Dr. Carrasco, bent on "curing the mad Knight" (and inheriting his money before he marries the Knight's niece).

Fielding is especially good in the stunning shield-of-mirrors scene when he appears as the Dark Enchanter, the Knight's nemesis, and in a three-against-one duel — Quixote fencing against three men in shields made of flashing mirrors — exhausts the Knight physically but finds he can't destroy his spirit.

SABINE RAJAN is competent as the "sweet," selfish niece, Antonia. Ms. Rajan, alas, looks truly sweet. I suspect Quixote's niece would be a bit more like her villainous fiancé, Dr. Carrasco. Elaine Kelbert captures the anxious spirit of Quixote's housekeeper, far more worried about "trouble in the

house" and the neighborhood than she is about the Don.

Richard P. Blanchard is very funny as The Barber who loses his shaving bowl, the "Golden Helmet." Lance Washington is especially good as tough Pedro, the Head Muleteer. Dennis Thomas, Don Pohlod, Chris Hogen, Gerald Hoy and Jeff Nichols are frighteningly good as Pedro's rough companions. These muleteers all have good voices and serve up a beautiful rendition of "Little Bird," between assorted innyard battles.

Vivian Fielding is a real hoiden as Maria, the Innkeeper's wife. Ms. Fielding gives us a woman without an iota of manners or fellow-feeling. Bonnie Weinrobb, as the woman prisoner arbitrarily chosen to burn, manages to utter a heart-rending cry in a tiny part. Ms. Weinrobb, and the ladder that creakingly descends from ceiling to stage, tells us all about the terrors of the inquisition in a split second.

Tempe and scene changes are handled well throughout the production. I want to give special credit to Sue Keesley, Jeff Nichols and Elizabeth S. Schweitzer for carrying off the Horse and Burro scenes. In a beautiful piece

of medievalism, these three actors, dressed in great animal heads and dancers' tights, totally conveyed the impression of animals prancing across the countryside. Kudos to the prop people for the splendid heads.

CHOREOGRAPHER Michelle Levine was amusing as Furlina, the lead Moorish Dancer. The Muleteers, doubling as dancers, and the woman dancers, Caryn Alexander, Hattie Titus, Danielle Blanchard, Michelle Levine, Bonnie Weinrobb and Sabine Rajan, were all very lively as they stole Don Quixote and Sancho's money.

Chris Hietikko was scary as Captain of the Inquisition. So were guards Dick Blanchard and Don Pohlod.

Musical direction by David Wilson was excellent. The tough score was played by clarinetist Deborah Schrader, flutist Caryn Alexander, drummer David Minick, Don Button on French horn, and Isabel Markowitz, alternate pianist.

Costumes by Helen B. King were dandy. The imaginative set was built by Jerry Wilson, Gerald Hoy, Don Pohlod, Chris Hogen and Eileen T. Weiss.

'Don Juan in Hell' preview announced

A preview performance of the Meadow Brook Theatre production of "Don Juan in Hell" will be presented at 8:30 p.m. New Year's Eve, followed by a gala buffet at Meadow Brook Hall on the Oakland University campus near Rochester.

Meadow Brook Hall is the 100-room Tudor home of O.U.'s benefactors, Mr. and Mrs. Alfred G. Wilson.

"Don Juan in Hell" was a triumph from coast to coast when it was first performed by Charles Laughlin's famed drama quartet. A full-length entertainment on its own, it was originally a dream sequence for "Man and Superman," a 1976 Meadow Brook hit.

In the play, Don Juan is in hell where he is confronted by a woman he betrayed in life and her father, whom he

murdered. The Devil himself serves as an urbane moderator between Don Juan and his furious enemies.

George Bernard Shaw imbues this dynamic situation with his customary sardonic wit and wisdom.

Theatergoers who wish to attend "Don Juan in Hell" and the Meadow Brook Hall buffet following the performance must make reservations by calling 377-3316 before Saturday.

Patrons who wish to see "Don Juan in Hell" but do not want to attend the buffet may reserve tickets for the special New Year's Eve preview performance by calling either the box office at 377-3300 or the community relations office at 377-3316.

"Don Juan in Hell" opens its run Jan. 1, continuing through Jan. 25, at Meadow Brook Theatre.

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