

Lounge theater under way with a delightful show

By DONALD V. CALAMIA

review

Detroit's latest innovation in theater, lounge theater, has opened with a vivacious production of "The Robber Bridegroom" at the Sheraton Southfield Hotel.

Performed in Yesterday's lounge, the musical runs at 8 p.m. Sundays-Mondays through Dec. 22.

Lounge theater, unlike dinner theater, allows its guests to watch an entertaining production without the expense and fuss of a dinner. Instead, theatergoers are allowed to sit and relax with a few drinks while watching the show.

Surprisingly, the concept works extremely well at Yesterday's.

SEATING FOR the show is intimately leveled around three sides of the stage. This enables all the patrons to easily see the entire action of the show. Seats also are available around the bar.

Waitresses working in the lounge before and during the production are dressed to blend in with the show, thus enhancing the production.

While the bar is open during the show, the waitresses are unobtrusive to the action on stage. In fact, most patrons are gratefully unaware of their presence during the show.

"The Robber Bridegroom" follows the lives of several notorious and illustrious residents of a small, recently settled town near Rodney, Miss. All the music and humor is "down-home" in nature, as the townspeople are portrayed in an earthy, tightly knit manner.

Producers Larry Cohen and Hank Krajewski have picked a difficult show

to open the lounge theater. Director/choreographer Michael Burden, though, has taken the challenge given him and has turned out a fine show.

THE PERFORMING area with which Burden was given to work is wider than it is deep. Many directors would have had trouble staging 12 actors and three musicians (few of whom ever leave the playing area for more than a few minutes at a time) in such a restricted area.

Not Burden. Burden chooses to keep his actors moving. The show is fast-paced from start to finish, and those performers not in the action are kept on an upper level of the playing area or off to the sides, sitting on the floor. Traffic jams are rare in this production, even in the delightful dance numbers.

Another of Burden's traits is to pull the best out of even the weakest of performers. All his actors are more than competent in their roles.

Few, though, are outstanding. What makes this production succeed is the sense of "plain ol' fun" which runs rampant throughout. Weak singers give their all, as do adequate dancers and actors.

What counts here is that the excitement and enthusiasm generated by the cast is infectious enough to quickly draw the whole audience into the show.

As the Robber Bridegroom Jamie Lockhart, Brett Reynolds is not the

dashing, debonair hero/villain that would be expected. Instead, his character is one of innocence. He is a handsome child in a man's body who wants things his own way, especially his women.

AFTER A SHAKY start, Reynolds' singing voice has a certain appeal to it, though it is not especially strong for

this show. He, like the rest of the cast, is having fun with his role, and the charm he exudes while doing so is fetching.

John D. Elliott, as the rich landowner Clement Musgrove, is a laid-back, natural actor who appears to completely fit into his character. An accomplished local actor, Elliott has mastered the use of his face and vocal

qualities to convey the meanings of his words and actions. He is a strong performer who obviously delights in his work.

He also succeeds in pleasing his audience. As Rosamund, Patricia M. Kelley portrays Musgrove's available daughter as a sweet yet cunning, naive yet sexually aggressive young woman who

is the object of the robber's attention. Ms. Kelley has a soft, pensive singing voice and expressive eyes, both of which are endearing parts of her character. She works well with all the other actors on stage, though she especially complements Reynolds.

Following the show, a country-western band entertains.

'Song' playing special matinee, 'Annie' upcoming

Neil Simon's "They're Playing Our Song" continues its extended run through Dec. 20, with a special holiday matinee added to the performance schedule at 1 p.m. Dec. 17 at Detroit's Fisher Theatre.

All reserved seats are at a single price for the special matinee. Tickets are on sale at the Fisher box office, phone 872-1000, and CTC ticket outlets.

"They're Playing Our Song," with music by Marvin Hamlisch with lyrics by Carole Bayer Sager, is still running on Broadway. The production in Detroit stars Victor Garber, best known for his role as Jesus in the film "Godspell," and Marsha Skaggs, who appeared in the National Company of "Grease."

An upbeat musical, "They're Playing Our Song" will be followed by a return engagement of the heartwarming musical smash "Annie."

OPENING DEC. 26, "Annie" brings back the National Company which had a six-month run at the Fisher in the 1978-79 season. The National Company still stars Norwood Smith as Daddy Warbucks and Ruth Kobart as mean Miss Hannigan, the orphanage supervisor. The new Annie is Theda Stemer.

"Annie" is the winner of seven Tony Awards, the N.Y. Drama Critics Award, seven Drama Desk Awards, five Outer Circle Critic Awards and a Grammy Award for the best cast album.



Victor Garber and Marsha Skaggs co-star as two people in love: Vernon, an Academy-Award-winning composer, and Sonia, a witty lyricist of contemporary pop songs, in "They're Playing Our Song."

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