

Thursday, March 16, 1982

## review

Musical charms  
at village players

The Birmingham Village Players production of "Dear World" continues at 8:30 p.m. Friday-Saturday, 7:30 p.m. Sunday and 8:30 p.m. March 26-27 at the playhouse, 752 Chestnut and Hunter Boulevard, Birmingham. For ticket information call 644-2075.

By Cathie Breidenbach  
special writer

"Dear World," the adaptation of Giraudoux's "The Mad Woman of Chaillet," is a musical farce, and it's cleverly presented by the Birmingham Village Players.

What it lacks in robustness it makes up in witty charm. Still, only an occasional song sets music bouncing off the mural-covered walls of the village players theater in Birmingham.

There are 31 people in the cast, many of them members of the chorus who must stand around on stage trying to look animated and natural — a demanding assignment.

In "Dear World," some of the stand-ons look more like people waiting patiently in line to check out books at the library than like vivacious Parisians.

IN CONTRAST, the staging is lively and expert; the set, simple and cleverly versatile, and the costumes, luxuriously imaginative. All the principals in the cast project a winning eccentric charm.

The musical is about a madwoman, who isn't really mad, of course. She's never bag-lady bonkers, merely graciously eccentric. Donna Ryder, who plays Countess Aurelia, the madwoman, is so thoroughly in charge of every gesture that she seems more like a hostess at a grand party than the resident crazy of the Chaillet district in Paris.

She's a fine actress who sings creditably but quietly. Sometimes lyrics get lost because her voice didn't project well.

WITTY LYRICS, not memorable melodies, give Jerry Herman's songs their charm. By the time I'd negotiated the puddles in the parking lot after the show, the tunes from "Dear World" had flown off into the night — the melodies forgotten.

Not so the character roles of crazies from the streets of Paris — among them the Sewerman, played with masterful deadpan irony by Bob Bowes, and the other endearing "crazy" ladies, Constance, played by Ruth Seranian in elegantly artsy rage, and Jean Conway as Gabrielle, with Dickie, the devilish imaginary dog.

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By Duane Stewart  
special writer

EVERY WEDNESDAY from 8:30 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. the Cooper's Arms restaurant in Rochester is host to a Dixieland band called the St. Aubin Street Ramblers.

The music is a slice of the past served up in a warm, homey atmosphere.

Numerous paintings grace the walls, and tables are situated around an old fireplace with a moosehead above the mantel. When pianist Bob Milne sits down at the antique upright, he is like a friend who comes to your house and after a casual comment like, "Oh, you have a piano?" begins to dazzle you with the expertise hidden beneath a smile of innocence.

In white shirt and black vest, with a long stogie smoking in his mouth, Milne tickles the ivories until the laughter catches amid the audience. Knowing people as he does his piano, he keeps everyone happy by playing the right notes.

THE FELT hammers dance along the strings until they strike your funny bone.

"I find that this kind of music is fun to play," he said. "People don't have to look for a profound inner meaning."

The St. Aubin Street Ramblers might not cut the mustard at a Beethoven recital, but as the life of the party the bandmen are in their proper attire.

They don't want you to listen to their music with your hands folded on your lap. They want you to clap along and get up and dance even though there's no dance floor.

Banjo player Ned Spencer, a Buri Ives look-alike, is a cuddly teddy bear in a red vest and black derby. He stands out in the Ramblers not only as a veteran strummer but for the jazzy showmanship of a bygone era.

TOM SAUNDERS, burly and bearded tuba player, is like the Greek god



St. Aubin Street Ramblers led by Bob Milne offers music with a lively beat Wednesdays at Cooper's Arms.

Neptune blowing into a seashell and summoning four mighty winds from his lungs. The oceanic depth of his music sweeps the place away.

Trumpeter Nate Panicacci and clarinet player Bill Roper pierce your ears with notes that could tumble the walls of Jerico on first try. Hold onto your shot glass. They're better than Memorex.

The band was formed three years

ago to play at the Woodbridge Tavern on St. Aubin Street in Detroit. Most of the members have been performing around town for up to 20 years.

Milne was a professional ragtime, boogie-woogie and blues soloist for 15 years before going Dixieland with the band. Chuck Moer's kept him on for 10 years and the Ramada Inn of Southfield also opened its keyboard for Milne.

A solo recording he made a few years back on the Jim Taylor Presents label (sponsored by the Detroit Hot Jazz Society) was reviewed in the March 1982 issue of High Fidelity magazine.

Times had nothing but good to say of the album "Bob Milne: Boogie, Blues, and Rag." He emphasized Milne's ability to rise out of the nostalgia of the style and be a vital and creative force in the here and now.

Most of the material done in the here and now of Cooper's Arms is improvisation and requests from the audience.

Throughout the evening, the band likes to have what it calls "walk-offs." If Ned Spencer is on a roll with his banjo, the others will get up and go to the bar for awhile until Spencer decides he can't carry the tune alone anymore.

"The rest of the band is so good," Milne said, "we can get away with nu-

JOHN S. Wilson of the New York

Please turn to Page 12C

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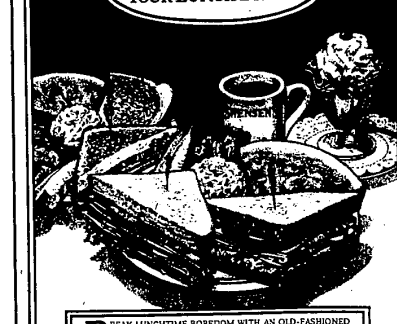
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