

Players does compelling production of 'Crucible'

Performances of the Birmingham Village Players production of "The Crucible" by Arthur Miller continue at 8:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday at the playhouse on the corner of Hunter and Chestnut streets south of Maple Road. Tickets at \$4 are available at the door, but reservations are recommended. For reservations call 444-2075 anytime.

By Barbara Michals
special writer

Arthur Miller's "The Crucible" is a powerful statement against the pettiness, meanness and hypocrisy of human nature. As ably performed by the Birmingham Village Players, "The Crucible" is a strong indictment of man's base side and a riveting theatrical experience.

The drama closely follows the real-life events in Salem, Mass., in 1692, when a witch hunt of unparalleled proportions swept the small community. Much has been written in recent years, as historians, psychologists, sociologists and even agronomists have sought to explain the peculiar mass hysteria that hit Salem. Miller believes the answer lies in that not-always-commendable instrument, the human heart. When the Rev. Parris (Boris Sellers)

review

happens upon his daughter, his niece and other young girls cowering naked in the woods to the incantations of his slave Tituba (Joan Reddy), the girls are literally scared out of their senses. In their repressive Puritan community, such sins are unspeakable.

AS THE PRESSURE on them grows, the boldest of the girls, Parris' niece Abigail (Sara Heeterderks) takes the offensive and begins to accuse various townswomen of associating with the Devil. The other girls quickly follow her lead. Pleased with the attention and respect their accusations have garnered, the girls play out their little game, and the scope of the tragedy widens.

Coveting another woman's husband, Abigail handily displaces her rival with an accusation of witchcraft. Another girl's father covets his neighbor's land, so the girl cries "witchcraft," and the forfeited land will be sold at auction. The petty squabbles of the past now surface as holy vengeance. Soon the

only way to protect oneself is to accuse another, a pattern of cowardice that becomes the norm in Salem.

Despite some first act stiffness and line difficulties on opening night, the Village Players' cast performs quite convincingly under director Barbara Underwood.

Tim Wittingler is outstanding as John Proctor, the earthy farmer whose simple, direct manner and innate dignity earn the respect of his peers. So repulsed is he by Salem hypocrisy that he almost gladly confesses to his adultery with Abigail in an effort to expose Abigail's motives and save his falsely-accused wife.

For Proctor it is a no-win situation. His wife will not corroborate his story, for she feels partly responsible for the adultery and does not want her husband sacrificing his good name for her. Ultimately Proctor is himself accused of witchcraft and refuses to save himself at the cost of denouncing others.

SARA HEETERDERKS is very effective. Abigail, whose pretended wide-eyed innocence belies her malevolent, scheming mind. She controls the other girls by sheer force of will, frightening them into blind obedience. When young Mary Warren (Joyce Choultier) does try to expose the sham they have per-

petrated, she becomes the next victim of Abigail's accusations.

Heeterderks, Choultier and their cohorts almost have the audience cowering in fear as their screams reverberate around the small theater and demonstrate the contagiousness of their faked hysteria.

Boris Sellers is appropriately arrogant and aloof as the Rev. Parris, more worried about his standing in the community than about the welfare of his parishioners.

As the Rev. John Hale, called to Salem as an expert on witchcraft, John Unruh at first appears a self-seeking fanatic, ambitious, overly confident, and theatrical. Hale is also among the first to see the tragic proportions of the Salem witch trials and has the grace to admit his mistake and denounce the proceedings.

Joann Sellers is fine as Elizabeth Proctor and conveys the nobility of John's suffering wife. Carol Hodges is highly credible as the saintly old Rebecca Nurse and Kay LaForest's Ann Putnam exemplifies the superstitious and vengeful nature of the Salemites.

AS THOMAS PUTNAM, Pat Delghan is arrogant and dour, the epitome of the greedy landowner seeking to benefit from others' misfortunes. John

Reddy's expressive face gives a lot of characterization to old Francis Nurse, who hasn't many lines.

Larry Sweet as Judge Hathorne and Dike Dwellley as Deputy Governor Danforth both have sonorous voices and speak with the aura of men who are used to unquestionable power and authority.

Howard Beer strives too hard for comic relief as Giles Corey, a stubborn, cantankerous old man who bravely dies to defend his property rights.

The very sparse set functions well, and lighting is used effectively. Barbara Underwood's program cover design is exceptionally good and well-suited to this emotionally-charged drama.

While it is generally acknowledged that Miller wrote "The Crucible" in the early '50s as a protest against McCarthyism, the play loses none of its impact taken out of a political context. There's a little bit of Salem in Everyman, and that's the real tragedy.

Votapek to play at Oakway concert

Culminating Oakway Symphony Orchestra's 10th anniversary season is a concert featuring pianist Ralph Votapek and the orchestra under the direction of Francesco Di Biasi at 3 p.m. Sunday, May 22, at Orchestra Hall in Detroit.

The program will include works from Beethoven, Mozart and Wagner and will feature Ernest A. Jones as guest conductor. Votapek will perform the Prokofiev Concerto No. 2.

Tickets are \$10 or \$6 depending on floor location. Tickets may be purchased at Orchestra Hall, 3711 Woodward, at the Botsford Inn, 28000 Grand River, Farmington Hills, or Executive Office Supply, 33004 Grand River, Farmington Hills. Tickets also may be ordered through the Oakway Symphony office, phone 476-6544.

Ralph Votapek marked a place on the American musical scene in 1959 by his New York debut as winner of the

\$10,000 Naumburg Award. He captured international attention with his Gold Medal performance in the first Van Cliburn International Piano Competition in 1962.

AMONG HIS winnings from that prestigious competition was a contract with impresario Sol Hurok, which continued for 14 years.

Votapek is the only native-born American to win the Cliburn Grand Prize.

He makes frequent trips to Latin America and appears often on PBS-TV and National Public Radio. Votapek also has performed throughout Europe and in the USSR. His concerts were sellouts throughout the Soviet Union.

Born in Milwaukee, Votapek began his studies at age 9 and has studied at Northwestern University, Manhattan and Juilliard schools of music. He is presently artist-in-residence at Michigan State University.

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