

# Edwardian comedy stretches out dull script

Performances of the Birmingham Village Players production of "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime" by Constance Cox continue at 8:30 p.m. Friday-Saturday, May 25-26, at the playhouse, the corner of Hunter Boulevard and Chestnut Street, south of Maple Road, Birmingham.

For ticket information call 644-2075.

"Lord Arthur Savile's Crime," current offering by the Birmingham Village Players, is a would-be comedy of manners about a would-be murderer that would be funnier if only it were shorter and snappier.

Despite individual performances that range from good to excellent, costume designer James T. Robertson Jr. gets more laughs with his wildly exag-

gerated Edwardian gowns than director Robertson gets from his script.

Set in a fashionable London townhouse in 1908, the Constance Cox play is based on a short story by Oscar Wilde. Only occasionally, though, does Wilde's crackling wit surface.

Young Lord Arthur (Steve Makowski), engaged to be married, must submit to having his palm read to prove to his disdainful future mother-in-law (Kay LaForest) that he has nothing to hide.

WHEN THE CHARLATAN palmetrist secretly confides to Lord Arthur that his palm shows he will one day commit a murder, the earnest young lord concludes it is better to commit a murder right away, before the wedding, than risk later blemishing his wife's character.

Without the slightest moral qualms, Lord Arthur systematically attempts to murder various superfluous relatives. His efforts repeatedly fail, due to bad luck and bungling accomplices. Murder, he concludes, is not as easy as it looks.

Makowski is quite convincing as the resolute and exceedingly foolish young swain. His open countenance embodies innocence and sincerity while he cold-bloodedly plots the demise of his relations.

LaForest is wonderfully icy as she hurls insults at Lord Arthur and his family from her Olympian pose. Carrying off her outlandish costumes with a straight face is in itself an acting feat, and LaForest has a great stone face.

Dile Dwellley is perfect as Balnes, Lord Arthur's slightly naughty but utterly devoted manservant. Posed and

imperturbable, Balnes can whip up a murder plot or procure a dram of poison with great ease, though he does make small mistakes like inadvertently administering the poison to his master.

HOWARD DEER is hilarious as the absurd Hens Winkleshead, the bungling German anarchist who just happens to be in the neighborhood and drops in to offer Lord Arthur advice or a bit of dynamite as needed. With an enormous Prussian mustache and a schmalzy ersatz accent, Deer's broad comic strokes work well.

As Sybil, Lord Arthur's fiancée, Wendy Willis appears all sweetness and light but takes to the murder schemes like a duck to water.

Donna Ryder and Ann Welman are effective as Lord Arthur's aunts, the



Barbara Michals

former representing the norm of good sense while the latter is sprightly and devil-may-care.

Phil Whelan is fine as Lord Arthur's absent-minded uncle, the Dean of Paddington. David Harmon is appropriately oily as the palmetrist and Ruth Seranian is amusing as the flirtatious cockney maid.

Robertson also designed the handsome set that complements his lavish costumes.

that "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime" is a period piece, cast members performed medleys of popular Edwardian songs unrelated to the play. This stage technique, known as an olio, was traditional in 19th and early-20th-century theater. The song medleys, all authentic turn-of-the-century material, are charming in themselves. They are adeptly performed by Whelan, Ryder, and Seranian, the latter delightfully pert and coy. The result, though, is to considerably lengthen a play that is already over-

BETWEEN SCENES, to emphasize

## Youtheatre's 'Cinderella' continues

"Cinderella," an original, new musical by Detroit Youtheatre's professional touring company, Prince Street Players, continues its debut for area family audiences on stage at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. Saturday at the Detroit Institute of Arts.

Tickets at \$3 for children and adults (\$2 each in groups of 10 or more) may be purchased at the art institute ticket office and at the door. For further information call the ticket office at 832-2730 during regular business hours.

In a comic departure from the original story, Prince Street's "Cinderella" takes place in the magical kingdom of King Darling the Third, who

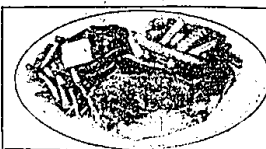
directs his son, Prince Charming the First, to scour the countryside for a bride before his 21st birthday in 24 hours.

In a musical race against time, with the help of a tap-dancing Fairy Godmother and her two stand-up-comic pages, the Prince finds his dream Princess, "Ella," among the cinders.

Cast from dozens of auditions held in metropolitan Detroit earlier this spring, Prince Street's 12-member, all-Michigan touring company is made up of professional musicians and singer-dancer-actors who have performed widely throughout the country on the Youtheatre tour circuit.



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