

Theaters offer shows for adults, children

New Peanut Butter Players delights with production at luncheon theater

St. Dunstan's revives America's past in glittering musical revue 'Tintypes'

Performances of the musical "Snoopy," continue in luncheon theater with the Peanut Butter Players at the Genesis Theatre at Mercy High School in Farmington Hills. Luncheon is at 1:30 p.m. and the show at 2 p.m. Fridays-Saturdays. For reservations, call 559-3893.

By J. Timothy Penn
special writer

The Peanut Butter Players is packing them in and with good reason. The new group, which bills itself as Detroit's only professional children's luncheon theater, appears to be all that it claims — especially in the area of professionalism.

The group's first production, the musical "Snoopy," is the perfect medium to showcase the talents of these youngsters who have gained their experience on metro-Detroit stages, working in both professional and community theater. The children are all ages 8-13.

Through word of mouth and Browline Troop leaders, the Peanut Butter Players has sold out all its weekend performances through February and there aren't many seats left for March.

Why? Simply because the audiences are out there and the cast does a great job.

THERE ARE separate casts for the Saturday and Sunday performances. At Saturday's performance, the children didn't miss a cue, flub a note or drop a line for better than an hour and a half of pure enjoyment.

Any group that can keep an auditorium with 150 people quiet for almost two hours when 90 percent of the viewers are under 12 years old has to be doing something right.

All the peanut-sized cast does a com-

review

mendable job throughout, but special mention should be made of tiny, big-eyed Katie O'Shaughnessy as Peppermint Patty and the perfectly cast Vito Guerra as Charlie Brown.

Vito is Charlie Brown. He is secure in the right places and insecure in the right places — just like the comic strip character himself. Katie O. lacks only the big nose as Peppermint Patty. She rolls her eyes the right number of times at Good Old Charlie Brown and probably has every kid in the audience wishing he or she is right up there on stage, too.

C.B. and P.P. steal the show without taking a thing away from their fellow players — a rare talent especially at their age.

All of the cast members double as ushers prior to the show — a nice touch.

A GOOD DEAL of credit goes to Producer-Director Jo Anne Lamun for coordinating these tots. This is particularly evident in the song, "Edgar Allan Poe." This tough, tricky rendition, which requires great coordination and precise timing, goes as smoothly as — excuse the pun — peanut butter on warm toast.

The lines of this group of pint-sized players go just as smoothly, as does each and every song — solo or group.

If this particular production has any weakness at all, it would have to be in the choreography. Having seen a number of these kids on stage before, I know that many of them are much more capable afoot than what they are

able to showcase in "Snoopy."

Deserving of a mention are each of the children who bring to the stage the animation needed for this vehicle.

Anne Marie McKenna in the title role is strong as the flop-eared pal of Good Old Charlie Brown, particularly with her song, "The Great Writer."

Carrie Bell is also cast right-on as the obnoxious Lucy.

CHRIS MC KENNA as Linus and Colleen O'Shaughnessy as Sally both look as if they are pushing the Peanut Butter Players 13-years-old limit but turn in very lively performances as would-be 8-year-olds. (Yes, she is Katie's big sister.)

P.J. Powers as Beethoven's pal Schroeder does credit to a smaller part in the production as does Kelly Boczek, even though she doesn't have a single line as the lovable Woodstock.

Although the second act drags a tad for the 10 percent of the audience over the age of 20, it isn't the fault of the players who keep the work alive for their younger audience right up until the finale.

Credit for this successful production also should go to Musical Director C.J. Nodus who keeps right up with the kids on the piano for the entire show.

The costumes, while not elaborate, are effective.

Now, if you don't want to take the word of this middle crisis reviewer for the quality of this youth production, I'd like to quote my often fidgety 9-year-old on the merits of the play, "Dad, this is a great play."

HE ALSO has high praise for the production itself served prior to the snack. "Put in that the hot dogs were good."

Everything about the first production of the Peanut Butter Players is well done. If this first attempt is any indication, there should be a sound future ahead not only for the stars of this show but for others in years to come.

Performances of the St. Dunstan's Guild of Cranbrook production of "Tintypes" continue at 8:30 p.m. Friday-Saturday at the playhouse in Bloomfield Hills. For reservations, call 644-0527 anytime.



Barbara Michals

"Tintypes" is a sparkling ragtime musical revue, and the current production by St. Dunstan's Guild of Cranbrook is a spirited romp through turn-of-the-century American music.

The five-character ensemble portrays American history from 1890 to 1920 through short musical vignettes. This was a period of unbridled optimism as waves of immigrants arrived to seek their fortunes and America abounded with stories of riches and success.

Gary Jones is a charmer as Charlie Chaplin, so designated only because his immigrant's suit resembles that of the Little Tramp. A newly arrived immigrant, Jones affects a convincing Eastern European accent, and he brings great pathos to an unusual rendition of George M. Cohan's "The Yankee Doodle Boy."

His infectious grin and rich, pleasing baritone are coupled with a strong stage presence that makes Jones a clear standout amidst the talented cast.

ANOTHER STIRRING moment in

the show is when Lindsay Balmer, dressed as a maid, belts out the Bert Williams number "Nobody" and brings the audience close to cheering. Playing Susannah, a shop girl, Balmer often seems stiff in her stage movements, but her full, rich voice stands out in the ensemble song.

Bonnie Cook, portraying socialist Emma Goldman, gets her chance to excel with a moving solo of "Joan Man." Cook is vocally effective throughout, while her expressive face conveys a sense of earnest idealism.

Pat Lynch slips easily into the role of Teddy Roosevelt and bears a striking physical resemblance. While his solo of Sousa's "El Capitan" is not especially memorable, Lynch does a spirited duet with Cook and does fine ensemble work as well.

Diane Rydland has the difficult task of portraying entertainer Anna Held as a bit of pink fluff not to be taken too seriously. Rydland's squeaky, phone accent may be appropriate since Held

was a celebrity created by the media and her purported French origins were considered dubious. However, when Rydland is fully in character she is campy and difficult to understand.

Rydland gets her best work in the trio number "Fifty-Fifty" when a disgruntled Held humorously demands an end to the double standard after her husband Flo Ziegfeld has been caught roasting.

"TINTYPES" ABOUNDS in familiar old tunes, all presented stylishly. The five-piece orchestra, conducted by musical director Marlene Loucks, provides good accompaniment throughout.

Debbie Cragin, the show's director and choreographer, keeps the stage movements generally brisk and the dancing simple but effective. Great care has been taken with the selection of period slides used to introduce the two acts. Despite a title that suggests stiff, formal portraiture, "Tintypes" is a lively, well-crafted musical.

Message gets through in low-key staging of old comedy 'You Can't Take It With You'

Performances of the Farmington Players production of "You Can't Take It With You" continue Friday-Saturday, Feb. 8-9, and Thursday-Saturday, Feb. 21-23, at the playhouse in Farmington Hills. For ticket information, call the box office at 826-5061.

By Barbara Michals
special writer

"You Can't Take It With You," as

presented by the Farmington Players, seems less madcap than usual, but the message of the play stands out more clearly as a result.

That message, the proverbial "take time out to smell the flowers," seems as important today as when this Moss Hart-George S. Kaufman comedy debuted in the 1930s.

The unusual doings in Grandpa Vanderhof's home have made the play's title idiomatic for many years. Grandpa (Bob McSweney) decided to drop out of the rat race 35 years ago. Since then, he has spent his time doing what he enjoys, which includes collecting snakes, attending college commencements and ignoring mail from the tax collector.

With but one exception the other members of the household also spend their lives doing whatever makes them happy.

GRANDDAUGHTER Alice (Tina Vlenev) is in contrast to the rest of the family by choosing to hold a steady secretarial job. When she falls in love with the boss' son (Bob Locks), Alice knows it will be almost impossible for the very proper Kirby family to understand her strange household.

The formally attired Mr. and Mrs.

Kirby (Dick Coe and Kathleen Monticello) arrive for dinner on the wrong night and are at first horrified by the chaotic lives of the Vanderhof clan. Eventually, though, Grandpa helps them see that the pursuit of happiness is more important than material gains.

In general, the performers are competent, but the comic potential of the characters is vastly underplayed. Mom Arvo makes the most of her small part as a Russian Grand Dutchess cooking blintzes in the kitchen, and Coe and Monticello as the Kirbys are properly stodgy without overdoing it.

Vlenev, in her role of Alice, and Robert Myers, as Paul, husband of Alice's mother Penny, both could use more animation. Erik Carlson's goiterness, as the housekeeper's boyfriend Donald, is cumbersome.

DIRECTOR Joe Doehler has chosen to present a rather laid-back "You Can't Take It With You." The slower pacing makes it easier to understand Alice's devotion to her unusual family, even if it means losing the man she loves. The less frenetic comedy makes certain that the message won't get lost, but the evening just isn't as funny as it should be.



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