

As Mama Rose, she runs show

The musical "Gypsy," presented by the Birmingham Village Players, continues at 8:30 p.m. Fridays-Saturdays, Nov. 29-30 and Dec. 6-7, at the playhouse in Birmingham. For ticket information, call 644-2075 anytime.

Liz Walters makes the pushy, tough Rose come alive on stage in the Birmingham Village Players lively production of "Gypsy," the Stephen Sondheim-Jule Styne musical based on the memoirs of burlesque queen Gypsy Rose Lee.

"Gypsy" tells of her beginnings as the second-fiddle, untalented daughter outshone by her sister, June, and of their gypsylike life on the vaudeville circuit.

Her mother, Rose, is the center of the story. Like a lioness, Rose lets nothing come before ambition for her cubs, not even love for Herbie, who manages the act. Tim McGee plays a credible Herbie, who loses out to Rose's ferocious determination to make stars of her daughters.

Liz Walters turns in a memorable performance as Mama Rose, the stage

mother of her own two daughters, and of a troupe of vaudeville kids who survive on paltry bookings and Chinese carryout.

IT'S ROSE'S dreams that keep the show on the road, and it's her big mouth that gets them in and out of trouble. Walters has a Merman-style voice that's perfect for the character of Rose. She belts out her songs and keeps the trumpets in the band in their places.

The band — as heavy on brass as the story about the stage mama of a burlesque queen ought to be — handles well tunes like "Small World Isn't It," "Together" and "Let Me Entertain You," songs the show made famous when it played Broadway.

The show has nearly as many sets as vaudeville had whistle-stop theaters in its heyday, yet director Isabel Himmelhoch successfully keeps the action moving and keeps all 41 cast members and an immense backstage crew on the move.

Pat Ward plays daughter June, blue-eyed star of the hokey acts Mama puts together for the troupe. She's like a kid



Cathle Brelendenbach

showing off in front of grown-ups. With her animated face, June can pull off any nonsense because she knows she's cute; didn't Mama tell her so?

Diana McClain plays a shy Louise. For years, Louise was content to trot around stage as the front half of a cow and let her sister reap all the praise. Suddenly, after June bolts, Louise becomes the focus of her mother's thwarted dreams.

McClain's GOT the legs for the role of Gypsy as well as a stylish way with her gowns, but when she struts her stuff on the runway, she doesn't radiate quite the same blend of chump and indylike sex that made Gypsy Rose Lee a star. McClain handles her acting scenes superbly, bringing to them sin-

cerity and a touching Audrey Hepburn vulnerability.

Costume chairperson Margaret Romnefine and the costume crew created a genuine cor-pose charm in the cow for one of the vaudeville acts, but they really outdid themselves with the outrageously gimmicky costumes that bring down the house when the burlesque queen saunters down the runway. Add what a runway!

With its flashing lights and clever circuitry, the runway is a masterwork in itself. Its presence tantalizes during the first half of the show, as the audience anticipates who will straddle it and what enticing clothes they'll be wearing when they do.

"Gypsy" is pure vaudeville — full of song and dance and brassy good humor.



In 'Nutcracker'

Kathryn Cooke is the Sugar Plum Fairy and James Dunne is the Cavalier in the 3 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 8, performance of "The Nutcracker Ballet" presented by the Contemporary Civic Ballet with the Oakway Symphony Orchestra at Harrison High School in Farmington Hills. Amy Uroel will dance the role of the Sugar Plum Fairy at the 8 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 7, performance with Dunne. For more information, see the Upcoming calendar.

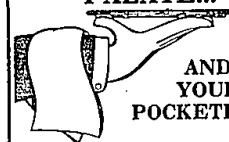
Players present family musical

University Players will present the New York musical "Once Upon a Mattress" Thursdays-Sundays, Nov. 28 to Dec. 1 and Dec. 5-8, at Essex Hall Theatre at the University of Windsor.

theater

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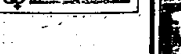
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