



Helen Zucker

Troy Players show has lots of energy

Performances of "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum," presented by the Troy Players, continue through Saturday, April 5, at the Troy Community Center. For ticket information, call 879-1285 anytime.

The Troy Players production of "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum" is spunky, energetic, and for the most part, what it's meant to be funny.

The good-natured cast seems to love this musical comedy, and its high spirits cross the footlights. The Stephen Sondheim songs are as fresh as today, and Shevelove and Gelbart's script is filled with punchy one-liners that silt work.

Craig Juleff is quite wonderful as the quick-witted Pseudolus. Juleff, fortunately, is rarely offstage, and his energy carries the production. Juleff's timing is super, he's always where he's supposed to be, his phrasing makes his singing a delight and he has that special, "crazy" quality good comedians have.

Philip D. Martin is dandy as Senex, the Daddy of Hero, who has a yen for his son's girl... Martin gives us a grey-haired Senex who's as sprightly as a jaybird, and Martin knows how to make the most of the good lines he has.

JOE BURDICK as Hysterium, the proper, hard-working slave of the Senex household, who doubles as Phillia, the virgin, is at home with Juleff and Martin. It's hard to believe this is Burdick's first stage appearance. He's at his best doing the most difficult bit — playing the "dead virgin" and singing "Lovely" before the mock funeral scene.

The enuchs are especially funny; the soldiers are quite clumsy (they're meant to be), and the courtesans are all winsome, athletic, noble and obviously enjoy playing "maidens of all kinds for sale."

The cast is a bit uneven, but it's a huge cast, and everyone hams it up gloriously. "Comedy Tonight," the opening number, and the Finale, a number that involves the entire cast, are lively and fit with funny bits.

'Charlotte's Web' captures fantasy

Performances of the First Theatre Guild of Birmingham production of "Charlotte's Web" by E.B. White continue through Saturday, March 22, at the First Presbyterian Church. For ticket information, call 644-7572 or 644-9043.

By Bill Bowles
special writer

review

If the late American author E.B. White could have seen the First Theatre Guild's production of "Charlotte's Web," the musical play based on his famous story, he would have been pleased. With a cast of nearly 50 and a sizable crew, director Del Moore has managed to bring out the sensitivity and charm of this delightful children's tale.

Several sparkling performances appear. Tineka Becker is fine as Charlotte, the maternally spider who weaves adjectives such as "humble" into her web. This is ultimately the salvation of the runt pig, Wilbur (adequately played by Kevin Skiles), from ending up on the breakfast plate of the farmer Zuckerman (John Roberts).

The barnyard is a special place where the animals and children use their wits to escape the insensitive forces of the adult world. In addition to the wisdom of Charlotte is the grudgingly given logic of Templeton the mouse (Tom Roberts). The insouciant Templeton is so irritably disagreeable that he can be persuaded to help Wilbur win the prize at the county fair only by being promised a glutinous affair with garbage such as melon rinds. Roberts seems to delight in this role.

Andrew Harrison, playing an "intellectual" ram, is another example of fine casting. Harrison has such a strong cerebral quality that he might be mistaken as an aspiring computer analyst at a costume party.

A VERY FINE performance is given by Katie O'Shaughnessy as the narrator. Her strong, clear voice serves to blend scenes together and adds a spirited "fairy tale" quality to the play. O'Shaughnessy's role is fortunately not limited to narration. In singing segments from the song, "Charlotte's Web," she carries her voice with poignance and vigor reminiscent of a young Andrea McArdie.

The costumes by Beth Murry and her crew are nothing short of wonderful. The spidery black costume of Charlotte and the sparse but clever pig costume are imaginative and visually pleasing.



Mary Jane Doerr

This 'Gondoliers' isn't good production

Performances of the St. Bede Players production of Gilbert & Sullivan's "The Gondoliers" continue through Saturday, March 22, at McAuley Auditorium at Mercy College in Detroit. For ticket information, call 557-6527 or 557-7781.

The music of Gilbert & Sullivan always sells — even when their operettas are not well produced.

This was the case last weekend at Mercy College's McAuley Auditorium, with the St. Bede Players presenting a slow moving, awkwardly directed and uninspired rendition of the English duo's 1889 satirical comedy "The Gondoliers."

Beautifully dressed in red, white and blue motif costumes, a cast of some very fine voices sings the absurd farce in non-comical terms to the sound of an out-of-tune orchestra. The audience, which nearly filled the auditorium, had little to laugh at.

CONDUCTOR JOSEPH Gamache leads the 28-member orchestra at a reasonable pace and is demonstrative in his cues and cut-offs. The production would be tremendously improved if his musicians played on pitch.

The 28-member chorus sounds strong at the end of the first act after having difficulty for most of the act with entrances and cut-offs.

George Bloomfield as the Duke of Plaza-Toro, complains of the lack of pageantry on arriving in Venice and back in Spain — no bands, no lighted towers, no enthusiasm.

That is what Gilbert & Sullivan is all about. This production misses the excitement and pageantry of the occasion.

Jack Jones, George Shearing perform together

An evening with singer Jack Jones, featuring pianist George Shearing, will be held at 8 p.m. Thursday, April 10, at the Music Hall in Detroit.

The benefit concert honors the late Mrs. M. Morton (Nita Zell) Barak. Mrs. Barak, known as Billie by friends and associates, was a leading member of the Music Hall Center Board of Trustees.

All proceeds will be added to the Nita Zell Barak Memorial Trust Fund, an endowment fund designed to support programming endeavors of the non-profit performing arts center. The fund was established with a donation from Mrs. Barak's husband, M. Morton Barak; daughter, Sandra R. Barak; and brother, A. Robert Zeff.

Tickets at \$75 per person include the performance and reception on stage afterward to be attended by Jack Jones. Non-patron tickets may be purchased for \$25 and \$20.

For further information on the benefit tickets, call the Music Hall development office at 963-8422 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays-Fridays. Other tickets are available at the box office, 963-7680, and at all Hudson's and Ticket World outlets.

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