

'Foreigner' good from all angles

Performances of "The Foreigner" by Larry Shue continue through Saturday, Nov. 19, at the Farmington Players. For ticket information call 538-1670.

By Barbara Michals special writer

"The Foreigner" is a delightful farce ably performed by the Farmington Players. A talented cast and fine direction result in a very polished, pleasing production.

As with all good farce, the plot is wildly improbable. Charlie Baker (Ralph Rosati) is a retiring Englishman who finds himself deposited at a fishing lodge in rural Georgia by a well-meaning friend who thinks Charlie needs a change.

Because of his low self-esteem Charlie is upset at the idea of having to maintain conversations with strangers at the lodge. To accommodate Charlie's request that he be left alone, his friend "Froggy" (Jim Sulteman) passes him off as a mysterious, non-English-speaking foreigner, or "furriner" in the local accent.

When Charlie inadvertently overhears a shady minister (Mike Megerian) plotting to get his girlfriend's inheritance, discredit her slow-witted brother, defraud the lodge owner and establish a stronghold for the Ku Klux Klan, he finds subtle ways to intervene and save the day. In the process he acquires a whole new personality, becoming a well-liked and valuable asset to his new friends.

Rosati is perfect as Charlie, at first so meek he virtually melts into the sofa and then growing in self-assurance until he is the constant center of attention.

When Charlie is down, Rosati's mustache droops and he assumes the soulful eyes of a basset hound. When

review

Charlie is up, Rosati cavors with glee, entralling the lodgers with a bilious miasm of invented language. Rosati's comic timing and delivery are always masterful.

AS "FROGGY," Sulteman gives a smooth performance with an excellent British accent. Megerian manages to maintain a credible balance between the glib charmer the Reverend David appears to be and the sleazeball that lurks underneath.

Mary Ellen Quesada is wonderfully funny as Betty, the good-hearted but not-too-sharp lodge owner. Both her comedic skills and rural Southern intonations are faultless. Convinced that the only way to communicate with a foreigner is to shout at him, Quesada's auditory assaults nearly lift Rosati from his seat each time.

Kris Conley is charming and effective as Catherine, the heiress filled with self-doubts. Bob McSweeney is frightfully believable as the menacing Owen Musser, an impatient Klan leader.

Kirk Hanley does a very fine job of making Ellard, Catherine's dullard brother, a sympathetic, believable character rather than a comic caricature of a retard.

Director Ellie Jorgensen has the show well-paced and her cast finely tuned. At Sunday night's performance, one badly mistimed sound effect only served as a reminder of how flawless everything else was.

Besides, the audience was already laughing too hard to care.

'Little Shop' won't disappoint

Performances of "Little Shop of Horrors" presented by St. Dunstan's Guild of Cranbrook continue through Saturday, Nov. 12, at the playhouse in Bloomfield Hills. For ticket information, call 644-0527.

By Mark G. Carley special writer

A community theater faces its greatest challenge when it stages a show that was recently a hit film.

Everybody has seen it, and everybody makes comparisons. Some are inevitably disappointed when an amateur production can't match the professional quality or technical wizardry of the movies. Happily, St. Dunstan's Guild meets and conquers these challenges and the audience, in its current production of the Howard Ashman/Alan Menken musical "Little Shop of Horrors."

Theater guild does 'The King and I'

First Theater Guild will present the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical "The King and I" at 8 p.m. Friday, Nov. 4, in Knox Auditorium of the Firz. Presbyterian Church in Birmingham.

Other performances will be at 8 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 5, and 8 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, Nov. 10-12. In addition, a matinee for senior citizens will be held at 2 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 5.

Tickets at \$5 will be available at the door or reserved by calling 661-0189 anytime.

A season ticket for both 'King'

review

Director Lindsay Balmer's production succeeds primarily because of an outstanding cast. Jim Andres is excellent as Seymour Kreiborn, a luckless drudge working in a Skid Row flower store until his bizarre (and bloodthirsty) pet plant mysteriously returns the store to prosperity, making Seymour the center of attention. Andres anchors the show well with his tremendous slapstick energy and strong vocal work.

Duffy Wineman is his equally hapless co-worker, Audrey. The archetypal peroxide blonde bimbo-with-a-heart-of-gold, Audrey is dominated by her sadistic boyfriend, Orin Scavo. DDS, played with malevolent charm by Don Schore. Secretly she

years for a quiet life in a pre-fab suburb with Seymour.

WINEMAN PROVIDES one of the show's highlights when she puts her dream to music in the hysterical, yet touching spoof "Somewhere That's Green."

Sury Leonard, Dianne Ryding and Nina Kirober are Crystal, Chiffon and Ronnette, a sort of Greek Chorus with a distinctly Motown sound. Their tightly blended harmonies and stylized dance routines move the show along at a quick pace.

Also featured in a starring role is the plant itself, Audrey II. Those who have seen the movie must wonder how this enormous man-eating vegetable can be presented on stage. Just how it's done I don't know, but it is done quite convincingly. The plant, which grows to about half the size of the flower shop, is deftly controlled

by one actor (Jag Pagnucco) with the voice provided by another (Bruce Ryding). Together they create a fearsome and funny monster.

Other fine cast members are Tom Springs as Mr. Mushnik, the flower shop owner, and Tom Peterson, a versatile actor who plays several assorted scuzzballs.

Marlene Loucks' music direction also stands out, both for the orchestra's proficiency and for the high quality of the vocal ensembles.

KUDOS ALSO to Ann DeMay whose versatile set envelops the audience and brims over with tacky detail.

Choreography, provided by the director and her assistant, Chris Pagnucco, is clever but rather tentatively executed in spots. The cast could have used one or two more dance rehearsals.

"Little Shop of Horrors" is a real challenge for an amateur group. It is heartening to see local talent taking chances and succeeding with this type of material.



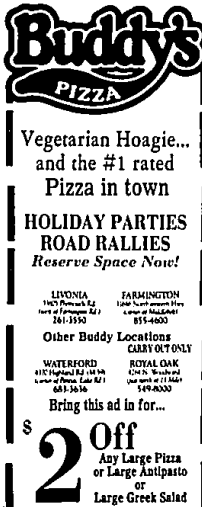
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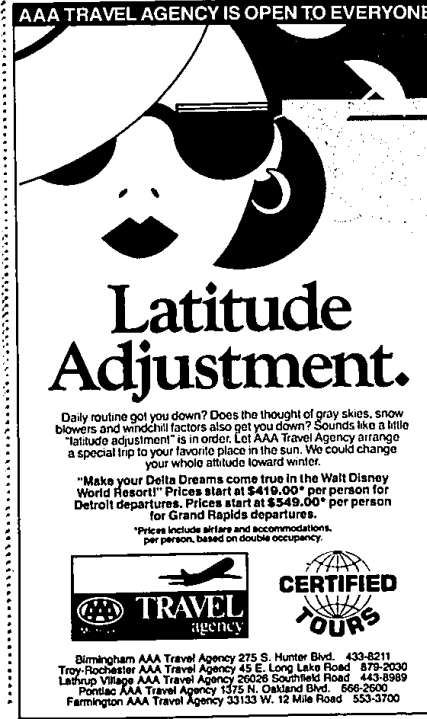
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