

Dinner and musical revue both exceptional

Performances of the Ridgedale Players dinner theater production of "There Is a Beautiful Land" continue Saturday-Sunday at the playhouse in Troy. Dinner is at 6:30 p.m. and performance at 8 on Saturday, dinner at 1:30 p.m. and performance at 3 on Sunday. For ticket information, call 844-8338.

By Helen Zucker
special writer

Ridgedale Players' venture into dinner theater is a smashing success. Years of working together have turned this troupe into a band of people who read each other's minds.

Only a company so cohesive could produce so pleasant and animated an atmosphere. And only cooperation from the entire company could produce players who move easily from cooking to waiting on tables to singing a well-rehearsed revue.

Lots of thought has gone into the meal as well as into the funny bits that enliven the songs. There are white linen tablecloths, red and pink carnations and large goblets on each table. The bubbly punch and cheese suppers are a nice start. The salad is crisp and the croissants are fresh and hot. The entrée, tender chicken Kiev, with wild rice, and green beans with mushrooms, is startlingly good. It's as if you went home for Sunday dinner and your mother had prepared your favorite meal.

You don't have to rise and go upstairs or downstairs for the show. Lights dim and the deft waiters and waitresses have changed their outfits and are onstage singing "There Is a Beautiful Land." Created and directed by Dan See, the show is a



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medley of great tunes that takes us across America.

THE TRIP begins with a nice rendition of "Manhattan" by Genie Garner and Bob Balderson and moves on to the spirited "Rhode Island Is Famous for You." "Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania" features wonderful tap dancing by talented Julie and Jack Tillotson, while Bill Glace does the vocals. Renee Sanger, looking like the girl everyone wants to take to the prom, follows with the beautiful "Moonlight in Vermont." Dan Fuller, who has a lovely way with a ballad, gives us "Oh, Susannah," "By The Time I Get to Phoenix" and other treats along the way.

Show stoppers belong to musical director Kerry Price and a ball of fire named Gwen Elbert. Price belts out "Hard-Hearted Hannah" while pounding away at the piano and manages to rouse the house to cries of "Bravo" in mid-show. Elbert has a well-modulated voice; she runs effortlessly up and down the scales. Elbert is very funny, tromping around in L.L. Bean waterproof boots and evening gown while singing "Swamps of Home," and her ladies-in-waiting provide great backup.

Mary Jo Wilson has a voice that's right up there. She adds to every number she appears in, and ends one of the best numbers in the show,

"Overseas Medley," with a heartstopping bit from "Ball, Hal." I'd have liked to hear Wilson sing all of "South Pacific."

Debbie Goody does a marvelous "Over the Rainbow," a cast member explained that the slides that went with the show hadn't worked. I hadn't missed them. The device of a young

girl, Julianne West, who stays onstage during the show, learning about the USA through its music, didn't need explanation.

ACT II is fast, strong, moving and often funny. It pays tribute to the Midwest with a nod to the Far West and winds up with a rousing paean to America. "Iowa Stubborn" is a neat piece of Americana. "Chicago" is funny, (though the slides of the Chrysler Building and the sweep of the Brooklyn Bridge on the slides above the stage right made me dizzy. Last time I looked, the building and the bridge were both in New York. Who knows? In this era of rap-

id change, maybe they were moved while I wasn't looking).

Bob Balderson does a nice job with "Hello, Detroit." Though the snail slides of the Ren Cen — looking as if it had floated downriver and attached itself, like a large, round barnacle to the Detroit waterfront — were distracting.

Producer Dawn Hooper, the entire cast, Jack and Jan Bazer, the prop people (who rounded up all the pitchforks, suspenders, hats and what-nots) Michael Panich and Bob Garner on lights, Carl Stewart on drums, Bob Jedd on bass guitar, and especially Kerry Price are to be congratulated.

DINING & ENTERTAINMENT

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Other good through September 30, 1989, excluding Saturday nights. Tax, tip, alcoholic beverages not included. Proof of September birthday required (driver's license, birth certificate).

table talk

Chili prizes

For the very first time, one team of chili cooks took first prize for best chili, as well as an award for showmanship, on Sunday at the 11th annual Michigan Chili Cookoff at the Lark restaurant in West Bloomfield.

Frank Klancnik of Walled Lake was awarded first prize for his Smoke in the Hole Chili. He will represent Michigan at the World Cookoff on Sunday, Oct. 22, at the abandoned Tropic Gold Mine in California's Mojave Desert.

Second prize went to Kathleen Cummins of Birmingham, who said she had entered the contest for the last six years but was a winner this year for the first time.

Third-prize winner was Joe Swiderski of Wyandotte. Other winners were Lou Filippi of Blissfield and Alan Fabian of Woodhaven, who tied for fourth place.

The Smoke in the Hole group got first prize for showmanship, with its entertainment that included rap singing and a band. Award for best booth went to Fabian of Woodhaven, whose booth had a smoking volcano serving up chili. Klancnik's Smoke in the Hole came in second for best booth.

The judges — myself included — agreed that this year's chili contestants made the finest chilis that had ever been offered at Mary and Jim Lark's competition.

Proceeds go for 10 \$1,000 scholarships, awarded to culinary arts students. Among area recipients are Howard Farris of Rochester Hills, Culinary Institute of America; Donald Harwood of Plymouth, Schoolcraft College; Jeffrey LaBine of Canton, Schoolcraft College; Jerry Painter of Westland, Oakland Community College; and Brian Tamm of Livonia, Schoolcraft College.

— Ethel Simmons

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