

Acting and singing are outstanding in 'Edwin Drood'

Performances of "The Mystery of Edwin Drood" continue through Sunday, Dec. 10, at the Birmingham Village Players. For ticket information, call the box office at 644-2075 anytime.

By Mary Jane Doerr
special writer

Edwin Drood is either an odious wit or an unfortunate victim of jealous rage. He is so arrogant he intends to go to Egypt to build a road to Alexandria using the bricks of the Pyramids. Yet, he can sensitively break off his engagement.

Actually Edwin Drood is a woman, a Miss Alice Nutting, a star-struck airhead who is hated by all the actors at the Music Hall Royale in London, where "The Mystery of Edwin Drood" takes place.

Actually, the play takes place at the Village Players in Birmingham, where hooting, booing, laughing and

any other kind of vulgarity is acceptable as part of the fun and confusion. Who is disguised as who? Who really kills Edwin Drood? Is he really dead? (No body is found, only a bloody coat.)

Nothing is for sure in this delightful, strongly acted and beautifully sung, three-hour mystery-and-musical special. A musical within a musical, the setting is a theater of Charles Dickens' day (Dickens left this novel unfinished), where anything goes. Actresses storm off the stage. Mr. William Cartwright (Don Castle), who tells the story, and the audience vote on a possible killer.

JOHN JASPER (David Paduka) is the cathedral musician of Clotterham, and he is an opium addict. Openly grotesque, his guilt is too obvious. He is in love with Rosa Bud (Janis Bender), who is about to marry Edwin Drood (Sue Leonard). Jasper's nephew, into the scene comes an easily provoked Neville



Mary Jane Doerr

Landless (Mark Carley), who rhapsodically has had prior unpleasant encounters with Drood.

No one is above suspicion, including the Rev. Mr. Crisparkle (James Masters), whose cloak may be only covering more passionate desires. But the audience doesn't know all the facts about the intertwined relationships of the characters or their true natures.

Anyone who enjoys English mystery will love this handsome production. Some 23 actors are in the show, many with substantial parts. They are all strongly cast in their roles as actor or singer. For the role of Rosa

Bud, director Lindsay Balmer and musical director Joan Bowes cast soprano Janis Bender to handle the difficult vocal solos.

David Paduka takes on the villain's part, that of John Jasper, with vengeance, and he adds to it a strong tenor voice. Cynthia Pritchard is a real queen of the red-light district as Princess Puffer. Mark Carley and Barbara Vories also make strong showings as suspicious characters Neville and Helena Landless.

In the show within the show, Miss Alice Nutting storms off the stage because the other actors are jealous of her for the attention she has received in the English press. Actress Sue Leonard in the roles of Alice Nutting, Edwin Drood and possibly the shadowy figure of Dick Datchery, can be a horny prima donna one moment and the next, a debonair young man. She is really sensational.

THE CASTING is so even. No one upstages anyone else, especially the masterful Don Castle as William Cartwright. With audience members shouting remarks at him, he ad libs all evening, making some very funny comments.

The dramatic style of acting and the English style of speaking give this show appeal, but the music is interesting, with a series of patter

songs and difficult vocal harmonies. Particularly striking are the "Moon-fall Reprise," "No Good Can Come from Bad" and "The Name of Love." A solid ensemble of seven backs up the singers, from the pit.

It is impossible to reveal the outcome of this scintillating mystery. Every night it changes, since the audience decides who is the murderer.

Mary Jane Doerr of Troy is a fulltime teacher and freelance writer who specializes in opera and musical theater.

table talk

Holiday tables

Elwin Greenwald, pastry chef of the Whitney in Detroit, has produced

French and Viennese desserts such as buche de Noel (holiday yule log), croquembouche (small cream puffs shaped into Christmas trees), plus Dobos and Sacher tortes for one of

the displays at the Cranbrook House and Garden Auxiliary's annual "Holiday Tables 1989" celebration. Greenwald's desserts are just for viewing, however, to go along with a French "Belle Epoque" after-theater evening display by Ron Fox of the Whitney and Van Dyke Place, who has created a lavish red and cobalt blue table dressing. The "Holiday Tables" celebration will be held Friday-Sunday at Cranbrook House in Bloomfield Hills. Admission is \$5 at the door, \$5 presale. For more information call 645-3149.

upcoming things to do

SANTA'S COMING

Children will have the opportunity to dine with Santa Claus when the Community Center Farmington/Farmington Hills hosts its traditional Santa Luncheon on Friday-Sunday, Dec. 1-3, at the center. Luncheon festivities include a hot dog lunch, carolling, clowns and a chance

for the children to give their Christmas list to Santa in person. There are two seatings, at 11 a.m. and 1 p.m., Saturday-Sunday. An additional seating at 6:30 p.m. Friday also is available. Admission is \$4 per person. For ticket information call the community center at 477-8404.

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