

Cast, critic both love 'Once Upon a Mattress'

Performances of "Once Upon a Mattress," presented by Nancy Gurwin Productions, continue through Sunday, April 29, at the Jewish Community Center in West Bloomfield. For ticket information call 661-1000.

Musical theater is delightful. It was obvious last weekend that everyone in the cast of "Once Upon a Mattress" thinks so. Nancy Gurwin Productions presented the charming Renaissance-style 1959 musical at the Jewish Community Center.

What a delightful diversion the fairy tale is from the sophisticated, hard-hitting, social-commentary musicals we have today.

A minstrel (Gary Lee Temple) opens the show singing the tale, in his sweet lyric tenor voice, of the kingdom of Prince Dauntless, played by a darling Steve Hartz. A princess must be found for the prince to wed, but the insufferable Queen Aggravation, played expertly by Phyllis Meyers, has held up matters with her unpassable tests for each candidate.

A chorus of unusually pretty girls and handsome men cannot get married until the prince does. On each failure the hopes of the ladies-in-waiting wane.

IN SWIMS a rough Princess Winifred, called Fred, who could not possibly be a princess, being poorly dressed and of unpollished manners. Nancy Gurwin herself takes this "Carol Burnett" role, in the style of a traditional Annie in "Annie Get Your Gun." Gurwin is prominent as an actress, commanding in her movements, managing to keep all eyes on her while she is on stage.

Tani Mough makes the prettiest Lady Larkin, singing nicely with her difficult boyfriend, Sir Harry, handsomely portrayed by Dale Van Dorp.



Mary Jane Doerr

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Lady Larkin, according to Sir Harry, has made a mistake and is pregnant, which presents a problem since nobody in the kingdom can marry.

The show's most engaging trio, minstrel Gary Lee Temple, Jester Larry Miller, and mute King Sotimus the Silent, played skillfully by Ron Strote, take matters into their own hands and convince Wizard (Carl Dumas) to cough up a few secrets.

Finally the mystery of the riddle of the "when the mouse devoured the hawk" is solved and the king is able to speak once more. In the meantime, though, the jester makes him have a man-to-man talk with his non-understanding son before his marriage, a very funny routine.

Larry Miller dances and sings a nicely executed number, "Very Soft Shoes," a throwback to the vaudeville dance comedies.

THE PRODUCTION sets are simple, with an impressionistic painting of a classical garden dead center flanked by two pillars overlooking a

like "Yesterday I Loved You" sung by Tani Mough and Dale Van Dorp. Is the princess sensitive enough to find the pea underneath the 20

downy mattresses? You have to see the production to find out. Kathi Bush's stage direction and choreography make it a pleasant evening.

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

not-seen meat for Princess Winifred to swim. Diana Reynolds' costumes are brightly colored Renaissance designs, the era of the lyrics by Marshall Barer and the book by Jay Thompson.

Music director Lee George has kept the simplicity of the show using three keyboards, herself, Susan King and Matt Kell, and percussionist Paul Drendzel. The songs are simple one-line harmonies except for duets

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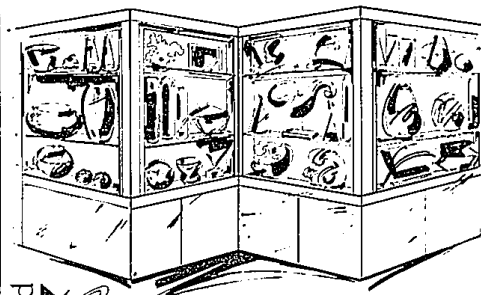
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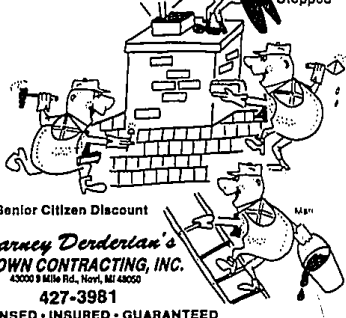
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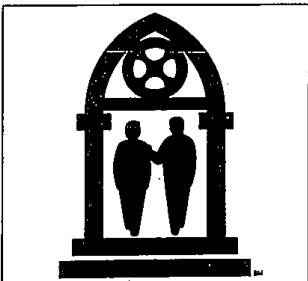
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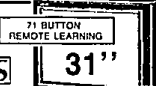
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