

# Suspense is missing in 'Ten Little Indians'

Performances of the Smith Theatre production of "Ten Little Indians" continue through Saturday on the Oakland Community College Orchard Ridge Campus in Farmington Hills. For ticket information call 471-7500.

By Sally Dubats  
special writer

The production of Agatha Christie's "Ten Little Indians" at the Smith Theatre has a questionable amount of the famed Christie suspense. Although well acted and paced, it sometimes misses the whodunit quality of the classic mystery/thriller.

Christie employs a famous nursery rhyme to the letter for her plot. In the play, typical of a Christie mystery, several unsuspecting guests are invited for a weekend stay at an ominous country estate. In this case, however, the home is on an island with no means of escape.

Director William W. Sharpe's staging of "Ten Little Indians" evidences little forethought or attention to detail. Entrances are made with other onstage actors blocking the view of the new arrival, actors are walking backwards and many times positioned to converse with other actors in a contorted fashion against but conducive to conversation.

Lead player Lee Martin as victim/suspect/guest, Philip Lombard delivers quickly said lines which lack meaning and innuendo. Martin, although an adept wisecracker, falls short of the playboy aspect of his character's ability to woo any woman, especially the intended target, Vera Claythorne (Cara Remund), another guest for the weekend.

PRETTY CARA REMUND's technical style of acting does little to en-

## review

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hance the love interest in the plot, as no chemistry whatsoever is set up between Vera and Lombard, and her character doesn't show an ounce of visible nervousness as various characters are murdered.

The third leg of this flint triangle, but only according to the script, is Matthew Scarlett as Anthony Marston. Scarlett chooses sarcasm for his character rather than the impetuous rich boy Christie intended. His delivery of lines leaves little room for the early-in-the-play flirting with Vera.

A saving grace of the show is Matthew Bieri as Detective Blore. Bieri possesses the self-confidence required of Blore and believably portrays the gruff but likeable detective. Tom Williams also renders a credible performance as Sir Lawrence Wargrave.

As various characters die off, the audience is traditionally inclined to wonder who the murderer is, but the staging, with few notable exceptions, creates no tension through the use of suspicious characters. Scott Mancha and Gail Bohacek as the manservant and cook are neither suspicious nor nervous. Mancha's "aging" make-up

looks more like white and black cat whiskers, making his character all the more unconvincing.

Kristen Williams as Emily Brent, the forthright religious fanatic foreshadowing doom, would do better to make her character a little more eccentric and her lines more significant, to add to her suspicion.

BY CONTRAST, supporting player Khaled Hanna is excellent as General MacKenzie. His performance as the lonely, feeble-minded old widower possesses the subtleties and complexities of excellent acting, and his quirky characterization succeeds in creating a mysterious atmosphere.

Robert Tavi as Dr. Armstrong, a perfect murder suspect via narcotics and needles in an old black doctor's bag, creates wonderful comic relief as the skittish and fidgety doctor — a nerve specialist, no less.

The set is fine and interesting, although no credit is given to attribute the ingenious black and white effect. Everything on the set is in various hues of gray, giving it an old-fashioned Silver Screen effect. Even the costumes, by Liz Werner, are black, white and gray.

"An Evening with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle" was presented Friday at the Birmingham Unitarian Church in Bloomfield Hills.

What images does the name Sherlock Holmes conjure up? A double-billed deerstalker cap, curved meerschaum pipe, an inexpressive face, perhaps?

All stereotypical for sure. But not one was created by the author. These are just a few of the many fascinating facts one learns from Mark McPherson in his one-man play, "An Evening with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle."

McPherson has scripted a show and performs in a style that is more lecture than theatrical. His commanding presence, uncanny resemblance to Arthur Conan Doyle's English accent, tweedy garb, authentic props and detailed factoids, however, combine for memorable entertainment.

Hundreds of books have been written about Sherlock Holmes, perhaps the most famous fictitious character of all time. Such was his impact on the world in the 1890s that the Great Detective seemed real to many. His creator, Arthur Conan Doyle, has remained something of a mystery. Mark McPherson combines history with myth to bring the author to life.

MCPHERSON is most effective when he acts out little episodes in Doyle's life. He would be better served with more of these and less straight recitation of events. Also, it would have been nice to learn more of Doyle's creative process. Perhaps some inner dialogue as Doyle sketches out the first draft of a story.

Nevertheless, McPherson is very good at presenting Doyle as a complex man whose personality and life were shaped by the rigorous Victorian code of duty, honor, commitment.



Bob Weibel

Educated at Edinburgh to be a physician, Doyle supplemented his modest income by writing for the equivalent of pulp magazines. His first Sherlock Holmes story, "A Study in Scarlet," was published in 1887.

Among the little known facts (except, of course, to members of the Baker Street Irregulars) is that by 1894 publishers were demanding so many Sherlock Holmes stories that Doyle killed him off (so he could get on with more important things). There was such a clamor that Doyle was forced to bring him back. These second-generation Sherlock Holmes stories include perhaps his most famous, "The Hounds of the Baskervilles."

Doyle went on to author many types of literature — was knighted.

for service in the South African Boer War (not as you might expect for his writing) — ran for political office (and lost — twice) — and spent his final years lecturing and writing on spiritualism.

Mark McPherson regularly performs for churches (his latest show was sponsored by the Birmingham Unitarian Church), libraries and colleges. Don't miss his next performance. You will find it most enjoyable.

Bob Weibel of Westland is a freelance writer, who has spent more than 25 years in community theater as a director, designer and performer.

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