

**THEATER**

# Village Players presents high-energy musical revue

Village Players presents "Sweet and Hot," a musical review of music by Harold Arlen, 8 p.m. Friday, Dec. 12-Saturday, Dec. 13, 2 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 14 and 8 p.m. Friday, Dec. 19-Saturday, Dec. 20, at the theater, 753 Chestnut St. (at Woodward Avenue, south of Maple Road), Birmingham. Tickets \$14, \$12 students, (248) 644-2076.

By HELEN ZUCKER  
SPECIAL WRITER

## 'Christmas Carol' retains its luster

The Village Players is celebrating their 75th anniversary in their new theater with a high energy revue of "Sweet and Hot:

The Songs of Arlen." Director Y. Jamie Mistry, musical director Priscilla Benson, choreographer Patti Ward and producer Helen Mistry put great sounds and deft moves from talented singers and a hot orchestra. Mark Hammell, who has sung on many stages, opens the revue with a jazzy version of "Sweet and Hot." Hammell loves being onstage, and his larger-than-life presence, and sheer joy in words, movement, acting, anything to do with the theater, adds much. He's Barnum & Bailey in "I Love A Parade," and does a great

"Come Rain or Come Shine" with Lynette Yeager. Yeager has a strong, marvelous voice and does a brooding, electric "Stoney Weather." She broods with Kelly Janney in a wonderful rendition of "The Man That Got Away." Janney is a ball of fire, whether tap dancing, cheerleading, singing "I'm Doin' It For Defense," or telling us "I've Got the World On A String." Oddly enough, this singer with a wide smile is at her best in Arlen's darker songs. Janney has range. Mark Tisdale almost steals the

show with "Last Night When We Were Young," and "It Was Written In The Stars." The unassuming-looking Tisdale carries these songs easily — and knocks them out of the ball park. He works well with Janney. Jennifer Clark, who looks good in feather boas, belts out "Down With Love," "Hooray for Love," and that golden oldie "That Old Black Magic" with John Pincha at the finale. Clark does funny turns well. She delights in bits of wickedness, and as "Lydia," the tattooed lady, she throws bits of her costume to the audience.

John Pincha is a sweet presence. When he sings "Happy As the Day is Long," and "Accentuate the Positive," we believe him. The ensemble numbers are the best. "Blues In The Night" is terrific, and the rousing finale, a complex arrangement of the Arlen song everyone knows, "Over the Rainbow" ends the evening on the right note.

Gail Sabney and her crew deserve kudos for all the bright costumes. Norm Gladstone on reeds, Dave Rajowski, trumpet; Shawn Vine, guitar; Luis Sliank, bass; Carl Stewart on percussion; and Priscilla Benson directing from her piano, made the night "Sweet & Hot."

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ting to the point where audiences will start rooting for Scrooge as they his cold, miserly, nasty self?

As usual, when I have a question regarding theater, I called on our Backstage Pass theater correspondents to enlighten me. This time, Gary Anderson had to field my neurosis. "Gary," I asked, "why so many productions of 'A Christmas Carol'?"

Sure, enough, Gary had the answer: "It's a guaranteed money-maker. It's a family-oriented holiday experience. It's familiar, so nobody will question the content or subject matter, and at this time of year people are looking for things to do as a family. Also, without dealing with religion directly, the play tackles issues of redemption, so it touches on certain quasi-religious issues, which makes it more palatable." Aha! A once-a-year show with no downside.

Is it my imagination, or is it the most theatrically adapted novel of all time. "Well, you have to see Tyson doing an African American version. There were two other feminine versions, one of them with Susan Lucci. Then there are the British film versions. The George C. Scott made-for-TV version which was done by CBS. I mean, you have faithful productions to the book that's been done in a long while ... it's not the most use story, it's one of them."

Beyond getting produced into

the ground, is it even a good idea? "That depends on the production, and on the script. There are several different versions, many adaptations for the stage. Some are more successful than others at rendering the best elements of the book into an enjoyable theater experience." How about the source material? "The book is great. The story itself is good. Well, what about that Pollyannaish resolution? Isn't there a growing legion of folks getting disillusioned with the gross commercialism of the season?"

Gary set me straight. "The play's message is contrary to the way the season has gone. If you listen carefully to the story, it's about a man who was busy

acquiring wealth at the expense of having a life. His only nephew doesn't even know him. And he finds out at the end that it's more important to care about others than to acquire wealth, contrary to what the world seems to think. "But there is a growing commentary on the commercialization of the season. There's a stage play called 'Inspecting Carol.' It's a satire about a company that puts up 'A Christmas Carol' every year. You're watching people who show no compassion for their common man, and yet they're doing a play where the main theme is just that!"

OK, I'm sold! "A Christmas Carol" is one of the season's great traditions.

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