Ridgedale Players presented a spirited 'Brigadoon'

BY HELEN ZUCKER
SPECIAL WRITER

The Ridgedale Players production of Lerner and Loewe's "Brigadoon" is spirited. Co-directed by Barbara Anne Gowans, Dan and Annette See and Susan Borin, the cast of 12, the female and male chorus and the tech staff manage to make this nostalgic musical stay afloat.

Kevin Branshaw shines as Harry Beaton, the unhappy lover of Jean Maclaren, Beaton, the son of a weaver who "canna" go to Edinburgh to make something of himself, who cannot leave the town of Brigadoon and who has nothing to live for is a square pot. Branshaw conveys a Hardyesque sense of unearned misfortune, of claustrophobia, especially in the forest scene where he is hunted by the well-intentioned menfolk and carelessly killed.

Megan Hughes is very fine as Fiona Maclaren, the girl who induces Tommy Albright to move from New York to Brigadoon. Hughes has great sweetness and she conveys it when singing "The Heather On the Hill," and "Almost Like Being in Love."

Bob Higle as Tommy, the fickle lover from the Big Apple who learns to be true in Scotland, is decent, restless, earnest and believable. Tommy walks away from a good job, a girlfriend who's let him call off their wedding umpteen times and his best friend. Tommy is definitely not a man for the nineties. Higle does a good job with the moving lyric, "There But for You Go I."

Carl Jones as Jeff Douglas, the fashionably drunk best friend who carelessly kills Beaton and gets to leave his bottle in a Scottish forest, does a fine job. Jones handles his wisecracks well.

Rebecca Hyke as the sought-after Jean Maclaren is a graceful dancer. Daryl Ziegelman as Charlie Dalrymple, the lad who gets her (and Edinburgh), brings lots of zest to his role. Roger Nowland as Andrew Maclaren, father of the two lassies, has a great accent and a commanding manner of speech that seems true to 1722, the year "Brigadoon" takes place.

Tania Velinsky is lusty and funny as the dairy seller who is half Gypsy, half Scot and 100 percent man-crazy. Michael Jerries looks the part of Mr. Lundie, the schoolteacher who explains the mystery of Brigadoon. Cheryl Adams does a solemn, graceful turn as Maggie; the sole mourner as Harry's funeral. Frank Gerace is a totally believable bartender. Jules DeWard does a great cameo as Jane.

Costumes by Doris Harmon and crew ar good. The kilts are wonderful. The bagpipes before the wedding scene are the best thing about the production. The sword dance is effective, and sorting out the Scottish clan names is fun. The energy exhibited by the large numbers of people involved is awesome.

Musical: *Bob Higle, (left to right), John Farley (of Plymouth), and Megan Hughes in a scene from "Brigadoon."*

Funny man producer meets star animator

BACKSTAGE PASS

ANN DELISI

Some weeks this is easier than others.

Writing in this space has been one of my favorite outlets since we started *Backstage Pass* over a year ago now at Detroit Public Television. It gives me a chance to talk to all the great segment hosts he have contributing in the various artistic disciplines. They're all top-notch professionals with real-world experience in their fields of expertise. They hail from respected places like WDET, Wayne State, the Detroit Institute of Arts and the like.

Then there's this week.

This week, I'm talking with Jimmy Rhoades.

Jimmy's a tough interview. He's ostensibly one of the show's producers. Ask him what that means and he gives vague answers like, "I sometimes roll around in a big pile of press *releases while my voice mail fills up.*" Then he laughs manically.

Jimmy's also an on-air contributor. "Why?" you ask. "What is his area of expertise?" Well, for 8-1/2 years Jimmy worked the road as a standup comedian (this is a self-reported description on his part). So when we have subject matter that we think might lend itself to a comedic touch, we send Jimmy to: a) incise and enhance said comedic offering, b) wring the comedy right out of the thing, leaving a sad, lifeless mess in its place, or c) it's a coin toss between a) and b).

Last week, he filled in for me on the air while I was out of town, and now he's contributing a report from the field. Is he behind the camera? In front of the camera? Apparently, he can't decide, caught in a Jekyll-and-Hyde-like duality that threatens to prevent him from even being a wholly actualized human being, or even from catching up on his filing.

So when we heard that Gallery Animato in Birmingham was bringing in cartoonist Paul Carlson for its exhibition of UPA Studio animation cels, we put Jimmy on the case. "When I was a kid, I wanted to be a cartoonist," Jimmy said, "and Paul Carlson is an example of why I should have done it. He's the nicest guy in the world, generous with his talent, and has absolutely loved his career."

And what a career he's had. Jimmy ran down his history. "Mr. Carlson wanted to be a cartoonist, so when he was 19 he moved to California hoping to get a job at Walt Disney Productions as an animator. They told him he had to have two years of college – he had none – so they turned him away. He told them, "Call me if you have any openings." Two months later he started out in the mail room. That was a great start because he delivered mail to everybody, Walt included. He expressed his interest in cartooning to some of the old animators and they took him under their wings.

"His credits at Disney include 'Sleeping Beauty,' '101 Dalmatians,' 'Lade and the Tramp' and 18 'How to Draw' books of Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Goofy, Pluto, Chip and Dale and Jiminy Cricket. He rose so high through the ranks that he was one of the few people who was cleared to sign Walt Disney's name to drawings.

"Mr. Carlson went up to UPA Pictures, who produced cartoons like Gay Purree, Dick Tracy and, of course, Mr. Magoo. He did a lot of work on Magoo, working in all phases of production, including the voice sessions with Jim Backus. He was the voice of Magoo and later played Thurston Howell III on 'Gilligan's Island.' Paul says that Backus *was* Magoo, that 50 percent of his lines were improvised.

"These animators never knew that these production cels would become collectibles. He says they threw most of the work away! He drew some characters for us, signed and dated them. He just loves to bring a smile to people's faces."

That's all on *Backstage Pass*, tonight at midnight on Detroit Public Television, repeated Friday at 7:30 p.m.

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