

# Studio Company does an exceptional 'J.B.'

**By RUTH MAIRY SCRIBNER**

Theater enthusiasts who are looking for really good theater are urged — again — to go to the Studio Theater at Oakland University where the Studio Company provides just about the best in the area — including, and often surpassing, professional theaters charging higher prices.

The Studio's opener is the Archibald MacLeish classic, "J.B." This reviewer has seen the play performed three times previously, once professionally with "names," but never better.

The play was performed with fire and finesse, thanks to Al Ruscio's sensitive direction and it afforded its audience a really fine evening's entertainment.

However, one is warned not to expect an evening of hilarity as "J.B." is a serious moral play but never dull.

**A NOTE from the director states:** "We live in an age of uncertainty — we must ask WHY??" Suburban question has replaced blind faith. This is the age of aspiration and anxiety. Archibald MacLeish provides us with an answer. Love affirms the worth of life — in spite of life.

"J.B." is the modern counterpart of Job of the Bible. The play revolves around J.B.'s fidelity to God when faced with virtually insurmountable tragedies and disasters of this modern world.

"J.B." proves equal to monumental challenges as old Job by being able to resist the temptation to curse God for his catastrophic misdeeds. J.B. utters that phrase of mortal submission, "Blessed be the name of the Lord."

This is in spite of the fact that Satan is certain J.B. will finally curse God for all the terrible, unwarranted misfortunes visited upon him.

"J.B." is written in verse that sharply and colorfully reveals the facts of the story and the spiritual trials of the characters. However, for those who think this would be problematical, "there is an old truism about the theater: what is done on stage is more effective than what is said."

In the beginning J.B. is with his wife and children, happy and prosperous, around the table at a Thanksgiving dinner. He believes himself to be a good man with a close relationship to God.

Little does he expect the tragedies which are to befall him to test his faith: the senseless death of a son overseas after the war's armistice, the other children's death in a car accident and murder by a psychopath, the destruction of his home and business by bombs, his wife's desertion and finally a plague of horrifying skin boils.

The play reveals J.B. maintaining his faith and repeating, (though agonizingly asking what his guilt is) "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away."

**BECAUSE** The Studio Theatre is small and intimate, the audience feels a part of the play and some of the action takes place on three ramps running into the audience.

"J.B." is set in a circus tent with a high platform representing heaven and a tilted ring on the floor representing earth. God and Satan (Mr. Zuss and Nickles respectively) are popcorn and balloon vendors who were once actors.

"J.B." is a play within a play and Zuss and Nickles are the commentators from the platform on the action going on "on earth" and are competitors for J.B.'s soul.

The set is as imaginative as it is complicated. At the opening the two vendors raise a tent which surrounds the acting area and represents the universe. The floors

which were covered with sawdust in the audience area gave credence to the circus atmosphere.

**THE COSTUMES** and lighting were of this group's usual excellence, the costumes of the wife and Satan exceptionally fine.

These did much to brighten the visual aspects of the show. Sound and lighting effects were important, integral parts of the production and had maximum impact.

The acting major roles were ably handled by Richard Winnie as

J.B., Lavinia Whitworth as his wife, Sarah, Jeffrey Prather as Mr. Zuss and Nickles by Dennis MacMath. Mr. Nickles is the only amusing character, even as he is being evil, in this rather terrifying play.

He was beautifully directed, for the most part, though a bit "cute" at times. MacMath executed the role with humor and certainly a great deal of acrobatic skill.

**MISS WHITWORTH** and Mr. Winnie brought much of the depth

of their tragedy to the spectators and one really empathized with them in their despair.

The play doesn't offer any very comforting solutions to mankind's problems. Even Satan, after seeing J.B.'s suffering and his reactions, cries: "It can't be borne twice over! Can't be!"

"It is though," God replies. "Time and time again it is. Every blessed generation." However, with the return of J.B.'s wife who carries a green sprig of forsythia,

one has the feeling that there is eternally a rebirth of hope through the only hope of mankind, love.

This is not an easy play, but a play of great moral stature — one which should definitely be seen because of its relevancy to today's tragedies and disasters.

The production continues Thursday (Oct. 24) through Sunday. Curtain time is 8:15 p.m. except Sunday at 2 and 6:30 p.m.

## Program on Alaska opens film series

"Alaska by Land and Sea" is the first program on The Community House 1974-75 Travel Film Series. Scheduled for Nov. 1, 2, nationally prominent photographer Charles Forbes Taylor will personally narrate his film study at 8 p.m. both evenings.

From the colorful Gold Rush country of the Yukon to the mountain glaciers, from mountain peaks to the scenic Inside Passage, Alaska is a veritable wonderland.

Taylor takes armchair travelers to see it all, including frontier settings, thriving towns, gleaming lakes, wildlife and the pleasant, friendly people.

Beginning at Edmonton, Alberta, viewers will travel along the scenic paved highway to Dawson Creek, Mile 0 of the Alaska Highway.

**TICKETS** for "Alaska by Land & Sea" are available in advance or at the door if seats are

available. Season tickets for all 10 programs included in The Community House Travel Film Series are on sale now, representing a substantial savings over the individual ticket price.

Preceding each film program, The Community House serves dinner featuring foods native to the country being shown on film. The dinners are served from 6 p.m. by reservation only (644-5832).

The Community House is located at Bates and Townsend, Birmingham.

**UP THE MORE** than 1500 miles of road through the wilderness (over 1000 miles of it still unpaved), Taylor travels with his camera to the Yukon Territory of Whitehorse and Dawson City, Mt. McKinley National Park and on to Fairbanks, Alaska.

Then by air, the audience will travel to Anchorage, Nome, Ketchikan, Point Barrow and back to Skagway, returning by boat down the inland waterway to Juneau, Wrangell, Ketchikan, Prince Rupert, Vancouver and Victoria.

## Baldwin spotlights UFO's

"Soft art" and UFO's will both be spotlighted Sunday at the Baldwin Public Library, Martin at Bates in Birmingham.

Guest of honor at the Library's autographing party throughout the afternoon will be Carolyn Yarbrough Hall, Birmingham artist and writer who has just completed her first book, "Stuffed and Stitched Art."

And at 3 p.m. Dr. David W. Stuppel, Assistant Professor of Sociology at Eastern Michigan University discusses "A Dentury of Contact with Extraterrestrials."

Long a devotee of the "soft art" medium of expression, Mrs. Hall spent about a year researching what artists around the country have been creating in the way of imaginative "stitched and stuffed art."

Showcased in the resultant book is the work of about 50 of these artists from the realm of folk art and fine art. Her objective: to provide an "art book" demonstrating the exciting and versatile possibilities of working with fibers and fabrics.

As for the UFO fans, they will be meeting at 3 p.m. in the second floor Jeanne Lloyd Lounge for the talk by Dr. Stuppel. He is a member of the Sauer and Unexplained Celestial Events Research Society of Clarkburg, West Virginia.

All those who would like to unravel the apparent mystery that shrouds the UFO phenomenon are invited to attend that free program.

Baldwin public Library is open Sundays throughout the school year from 1 to 5 p.m.



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