

'Two Gentlemen of Verona' joyous show

By CRAIG REYNOLDS

"Two Gentlemen of Verona" at The Theatre of the University of Detroit-Kellogg College is as much a demonstration of remarkable stamina and concentration as it is an excellent entertainment.

The Shakespeare play long before he guessed that "The Man Nobody Knows" might go to Washington for the American College Theatre Festival.

But that first production of his 1973-74 season did go to Washington, was a sensation and really changed 11 critical days out of "Two Gentlemen's" rehearsal period.

The truncated preparation time was fairly apparent in an opening night performance of "Two Gentlemen of Verona" that was a bit less sharp and considerably of the steady pace of superior theatrical achievement expected of UofD-Kellogg productions.

NEVERTHELESS, in the five days between Missimi & Company's return from Washington and the first public performance of "Two Gentlemen," the huge assembly of performers, musicians and technicians pulled together an entertainment that is at least joyous, although not ecstatic.

The quality of each act—of being overwhelmingly complete; of being out of love, of gaining, of giving or taking away love—supplies the excitement of "Two Gentlemen's" pop rock adaptation by John Guare, Mel Shapiro and Gail McDermod.

This sense of witless, intoxicating abandonment to the happier aspects of passion was the missing link which in an otherwise satisfying opening night performance of colors, sounds, textures, engaging performers and a Chinese dragon.

Aside from the dragon, the most engaging performer must be Denise Blason, a great bank of talent compressed in a diminutive and delectable package.

Her competitors at the top of the cast roster were noticeably less assured with the chaotic demands of the play, though they did speak and sing very well.

PRELIMINARY definition of character have not apparently been made; leading man Proteus, after all, a two-timing school but so irrepensible and always lovable school, as is proved when his jilted Julia returns to him.

The stunner Sylvia looks as though she should move a Myron to infidelity, but she only looks and never moves; and Proteus' good (old) Valentine acts more like a serious jail warden than seeker of good fortune and good times in the big city.

These shortcomings may return to director Denise Blason, who in the past has relied on extensive rehearsal with the script to evolve character out of the lines rather than starting right out by putting characters into the words.

The failure of this evolutionary approach is particularly obvious in the meaningless recitations of the original Shakespearean speeches which still crop up from time to time in the contemporary "Two Gentlemen."

Two performers who do have a flying start on the spirit are the letter of "Two Gentlemen" are Owen J. Anderson of Southfield and Ronald S. Martin of West Bloomfield.

AS THE TWO servants Launce and Speed they not only add a couple of the best comic songs in the show, they also act with consistent comic inventiveness. Launce's contrasting of simple-minded propriety and systematic prudence, coupled with heartfelt devotion to his dog Crab particularly shows Anderson's vaudevillian mastery.

A special mention also goes to the large chorus, which moved and sang with unity, purpose and spirit.

Many Missimi's costumes are colorful and well-crafted as always, but Paul A. Norrenbrock had little time to do anything startling with the set change from Verona

to Milan, and even less time to do anything good with the lighting.

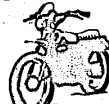
Rudolph V. Hawkins decides as musical director and pianist, tripling problems in an orchestra pit which climbs up to the proscenium arch and often throws the orchestra into three different worlds.

A sound system is needed to do "Two Gentlemen" properly, but not the sound system used at The Theatre. Super-sensitive microphones and an insensitive PA do not a rock musical make; the amplification for "Two Gentlemen" is the one unmitigated disaster in an otherwise agreeable production.

THERE IS much to agree with in the show, from a clever script, good music and excellent chorus work to a number of very good performances.

Spring this year is perhaps not everything one might wish, and if of D-Kellogg's "Two Gentlemen of Verona" it perhaps not everything one might expect from The Theatre's final production of the season.

UNBEATABLE



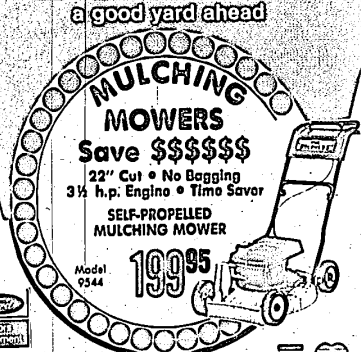
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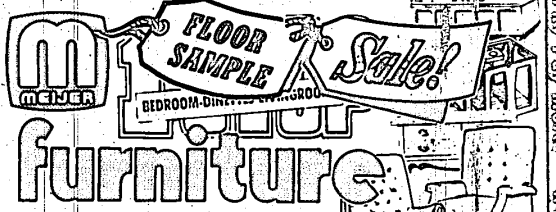
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