

'The Tempest' deserves more than it gets

By ETHEL SIMMONS

Review

The Meadow Brook Theatre production of "The Tempest" is wracked by more than one storm.

This show, which had its opening night moved back when the blizzard struck, is now in its second week. But performances are coming from all directions, with some playing Shakespeare light, others heavy.

The magic of Prospero's island that should brighten the drama fizzles more than flashes, and we aren't swept away by enchantment. The orange and green stage set rises in tiers at the center, resembling an overstuffed, cheap sofa.

Prospero, the rightful Duke of Milan who has been cast on this desert island, is played by G. Wood. Wood has a sonorous voice and, with his bald head, resembles a somber Kojak.

HE SEES his role as a serious one and while the performance is skillful it doesn't touch the heart. His daughter Miranda looks delicate, moves with a dancer's grace but speaks so softly at times her voice is hard to hear.

Ariel, a spirit of the air, is Prospero's right hand. He goes to do Prospero's bidding, bringing the survivors of a shipwreck to join them on the bleak island.

Gilbert Cole springs through the air, bare-chested in a bikini decorated with seashells. His Ariel is theatrical, when he might better be playful, or merely forceful.

As Ferdinand, son of the King of Naples and one among the shipwrecked, Michael Hendricks turns in a nice performance. Ferdinand meets and is smitten with Miranda, in gentlemanly fashion. Hendricks is young, eager and plays his part as if he doesn't know he's doing Shakespeare—delightful.

Richard Hilger is Caliban, a creature of the island, a role that challenges an actor to be monstrous yet vulnerable. Hilger's lines roll from his throat, creating a dangerous creature. He is compelling but overwhelms the part.

COMIC RELIEF of another sort is provided by Trinculo, a shipwrecked steward portrayed by William Le Masena, and Thom Bray as Stephano, his drunken friend. Both wring all the

humor their lines and actions hold. They are an engaging, bumbling pair.

There are some goddesses, well acted with regal authority by Patricia Reilly, Mary Benson and Marianne Muellerleile. Strange creatures and nymphs also cavort, the nymphs easily surpassing the funny-fearsome creatures in audience appeal.

Others in the cast who portray the shipwrecked passengers and crew, including Louis Edmonds as Alonso, King of Naples, all give good supporting performances.

Terence Kilburn, Meadow Brook's artistic director, who usually has a light touch, has let his actors perform at odds. The set design by Peter Hicks is astonishing and ugly. The costumes by Mary Lynn Bonnell do nothing to enhance Ariel, Miranda and even Caliban.

"The Tempest" is more than boy meets girl. Its plot also involves the exiled Prospero's receiving his title gain, Ariel gaining his freedom.

This play, said to be Shakespeare's farewell to the theater, contains other meaningful messages but they haven't been brought out clearly in this production.

Performances of "The Tempest" continue Feb. 19 at Meadow Brook Theatre on the Oakland University campus in Rochester.



Prospero (G. Wood) is the magical master of the island inhabited by the savage Caliban.

Village Players do a lively 'Promises, Promises'

By BARBARA MICHALS

Bouncing with rhythm and vitality, the Birmingham Village Players production of Neil Simon's "Promises, Promises" is the perfect pick-me-up for anyone with the mid-winter blues.

Simon's customary wit, Burt Bacharach's lively, upbeat music and the players' professional poise are a hard-to-beat combination.

"Promises, Promises" is a musical version of the award-winning film "The Apartment." Chuck Baxter, an ambitious young employee of a giant insurance company, discovers that the key to advancement is the key to his bachelor apartment. The company's married executives, most of them middle-aged, need a discreet spot for their romantic trysts.

Plot complications ensue when the all-powerful personnel manager wants

an exclusive option on the use of the apartment, and he and Baxter become involved with the same young lady.

AS BAXTER, John Unruh is sensational, combining a high degree of competence with a large measure of boyish charm that surely endears him to every female in the audience. Unruh, who has displayed considerable comic flair in previous players productions, pulls out all the stops in terms of facial expressions, body English and voice inflections. The result is perfection.

Fran Kubelik, the object of Baxter's affections, is played with considerable aplomb by Elissa Jacobson. Hers is one of the better voices in the show, especially on the hit song "I'll Never Fall in Love Again."

That is the only one of the Hal Davis songs that's memorable despite Bacharach's delightful score. However, when a quartet of office Lotharios sing

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"Where Can You Take a Girl?" they nearly steal the show, no mean feat considering Unruh's adept performance.

The quartet consists of Jim Balmer, Don Schore, Phil Whelan and Al Ratcliffe. Ratcliffe dominates the stage whenever he appears, his twinkling eyes and lecherous grin producing hilarity.

As Sheldrake, the amorous personnel manager who wears out office girls as if they were typewriter ribbons, Bud Matych is generally convincing—smooth enough to win Miss Kubelik's heart and caddish enough to earn Baxter's disgust.

MATYCH HAD some minor trouble

with lines Friday night, but his always-impressive singing voice overshadows any shortcomings. His solo "Wanting Things" left one wanting to hear him sing more.

Ben Benson is appealing as Baxter's next-door neighbor, a physician. The bemused doctor marvels at what he believes to be Baxter's sexual stamina, when in reality lonesome Baxter is sitting out on a park bench while his apartment is in use.

The 13-piece orchestra, under the direction of Duncan Jones, also sounds polished, though a bit too loud for the size of the theater. Lyrics are occasionally drowned out. A five-voice chorus seated with the orchestra effectively accentuates the musical beat.

Director Jean Hall does an admirable job overall, particularly with the brisk pacing. Lighting cues are in perfect synchronization with the stage crew, allowing extensive set changes

to be made as smoothly as possible.

With such a high-caliber production, only the dancers' costumes seem amateurish. Intended to be a bit tacky, they go beyond the call of duty and are extremely unflattering as well.

"Promises, Promises" has final performances Friday and Saturday with a 9 p.m. curtain. Since the Village Players so frequently draw sell-out crowds, a show with as wide appeal as this one should perhaps consider a longer run.

Masterwork film 'Cria!' to be shown

Cited as a masterwork by noted film critics, the Spanish film "Cria!" directed by Carlos Saura in 1977 will be screened by Detroit Film Theatre on Friday.

There will be two showings, at 7 and 9:30 p.m. in the Detroit Institute of Arts auditorium.

Starring Geraldine Chaplin and Ana Torrent, child star of "Spirit of the Beehive," the film portrays the world as seen through the eyes of a child.

"Cria!" is one of a roster of 18 films, first-run or short run in Detroit, presented in the Friday segment of Detroit Film Theatre's weekend

series. Saturday evenings will be devoted to films which have earned the distinction of being considered classics.

Fifteen films covering the career of Francois Truffaut will be screened Sunday evenings in a program d'A Truffaut Retrospective.

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