

Will-O-Way performers achieve right blend

By BARBARA MICHALS

Butterflies may be free, but people are not. That's the dominant theme of Leonard Gershte's bitter-sweet drama "Butterflies Are Free," the current production at the Will-O-Way Repertory Theatre.

This is a play about commitments and those who are afraid of making them and those who are afraid of letting go. The Will-O-Way presentation is effective and loving, achieving the right mixture of comedy and pathos.

Don Baker, a young blind man on the brink of adulthood, is trying to assert his independence and be free of his overprotective mother. Against his mother's wishes he has moved into his own apartment, determined to prove he can make it on his own.

Don falls in love with his next-door neighbor, Jill Turner, a kooky free-spirit whose life is as untidy as her cluttered apartment. Jill shuns com-

'Male Animal' cast selected

The cast for the James Thurber-Elliott Nugent comedy "The Male Animal" has been announced by Terence Kilburn, artistic director for Meadow Brook Theatre.

"The Male Animal" will open a four-week run at Meadow Brook March 23 at 8:30 p.m. Following its run at Oakland University, "The Male Animal" will tour throughout the state for three weeks.

The comedy is a Thurber cartoon brought to life. Thurber's favorite theme, the battle of the sexes, is pursued on stage as the chief combatant, a mild-mannered English professor at a midwestern university, faces his wife's former football hero and a crisis of academic freedom.

Edgar Meyer will portray the embattled professor. Meyer has performed at Meadow Brook in "How the Other Half Loves," "Harvey" and "Born Yesterday."

FRISCILLA MORRILL has been cast as the professor's harried wife. Earlier at Meadow Brook Miss Morrill played Martha in "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" and Lola in the 1975

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ment to the point where she can't even keep a dimor date. She is immature, confused, and groping, but she has more insight into Don's needs than does his mother.

ALTHOUGH SOCIETY would regard Don as the one who is handicapped, he succeeds in showing Jill that she is the one who is emotionally troubled. Together, they learn that no one is totally free. Jill comes to know the value of an emotional commitment and Don is able to reach a more comfortable understanding with his mother.

Although she has kept her son segregated from the mainstream of life far too long, with Jill's help Mrs. Baker

finally realizes that her overwhelming love for Don can no longer protect him from the emotional vulnerability of adulthood.

The line "none are so blind as those who will not see," a platitude from one of the children's books she has authored, is thrown up to Mrs. Baker at every opportunity.

Michael Eddy is likeable and convincing as Don. One minute he is smugly sarcastic to his mother, and the next a hurt and confused child.

Though Eddy stumbles on some lines, he does an excellent job of sustaining the vacant stare of the blind.

As Jill, Eileen Weiss gives a highly credible performance. She is amusing without allowing Jill's kookiness to overshadow her other interesting qualities. One of Jill's eccentricities is her voracious appetite, and Miss Weiss manages to enunciate clearly even when her mouth is frequently full of food.

As Mrs. Baker, Dee Dweley repeats

the role she played effectively with the Birmingham Village Players a few years back. Mrs. Baker is again kept pleasantly understated, avoiding the usual comic stereotypes of the over-protective mother.

IN A SUPPORTING role, John Connolly is rather wooden as Ralph Austin, Jill's new employer and would-be lover.

Under the direction of Celia Merrill Turner, "Butterflies Are Free" is sol-

idly entertaining. All the players had some minor difficulties with lines Saturday night and lighting cues seemed slow and awkward, but these bugs are easily worked out.

Incidentally, Will-O-Way seems to have repaired its leaky roof and improved the heating, greatly adding to the audience's comfort.

Performances continue Friday and Saturday through April 8, excluding Easter weekend. Curtain time is 8:30 p.m.

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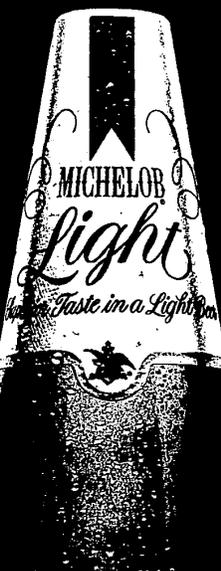
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