

Excellent acting strengthens 'Lion in Winter'

By BARBARA MICHALS

Theater

Billing "The Lion in Winter" as a "dramatic comedy" seems appropriate, for the James Goldman play explores contradictions within its characters. The current production at the Will-O-Way Repertory Theatre offers fine performances that more than compensate for some staging difficulties.

The lion is England's King Henry II, in 1183 facing the declining years of his long reign. His eldest son has recently died, and the central dilemma is which of his remaining three power-hungry sons shall he name heir.

While each of the sons plots to win Henry's throne, his queen, Eleanor of Aquitaine, schemes to humble Henry, ensure the throne for her favorite son and regain some of her former power and influence.

Further complicating matters, King Philip of France wants his sister to marry Henry's heir, but Henry has taken the young princess as his mistress.

HENRY CAN BE a cold-blooded, willful monarch, but underneath he's a grieving father, bitterly disappointed in the character of his sons. Eleanor is steel-plated, denounced by each of her family for her Machiavellian intrigues, yet she reveals a deep underlying tenderness towards those against whom she plots. Both Henry and Eleanor are very human, but they've been conditioned to value land and power ahead of people.

As Henry, Dike Dwelley does an impressive job. His resonant voice and polished stage presence are befitting a monarch, but these regal traits never overshadow Henry's sadness and vulnerability.

Dee Dwelley is equally impressive as she portrays the subtleties of Eleanor's complex character. The interplay of her conflicting emotions is finely etched in facial expressions and voice inflections.

Mrs. Dwelley moved into the demanding role on short notice when the actress scheduled for the part underwent emergency surgery. As a result the play's opening was delayed a week. Saturday night's performance revealed some rough edges still to be worked out.

The most serious problem is the sluggish scene changes that slow the pace of the play considerably. The effect is an undesired choppyness.

TWO OF HENRY'S sons also have contradictory natures. The eldest, Richard the Lion-Hearted, is full of a soldier's bluster, but when the opportunity arises to kill his father he cannot go through with it. Pietro DiGiorgio's rich speaking voice gives Richard a commanding presence, but the actor seems ill at ease as he strides about in his tunic and tights.

Geoffrey, the middle son, seems a colorless nonentity to his parents, but in reality he is the most ruthless schemer of the three. At times Michael Enlow is appropriately bland as Geoffrey, while at other times he is touching as he complains of his parents' indifference towards him.

As John, the youngest son, Joseph Palms is almost too perfect in his portrayal of a spoiled brat. Though Palms draws laughs for some moments of broad comedy, John becomes a caricature rather than a clearly-defined character.

Eileen Weiss is sweet and tender as the French princess, the one person who does care more for people than for power and influence. Steven Pyykkonen is convincing as Philip, young, French king struggling to hold his own against the newly old lion of England.

While the simple sets are effective,

the costuming for the production is uneven. Eleanor and Philip look opulent enough, but Henry and his sons

look recycled and downright seedy. Under the direction of Celia Merrill Turner, "The Lion in Winter" will run

in repertory alternate weekends until June 17. "Guys and Dolls," the Frank Loesser musical based on Damon Run-

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