

# 'Skin of Our Teeth' edges in

By GAY ZIEGER

When life crumbles about you, is it worth picking yourself up, dusting yourself off, and starting all over again?

Apparently so, according to Thornton Wilder in his 1942 drama "The Skin of Our Teeth," now being performed by the Will-O-Way Repertory Theatre in Bloomfield Township. For man, despite stock market crashes, pestilence, war, and nature (his own and that having to do with weather) shall prevail.

And so man does in this two-and-a-half-hour tragic-comedy made more serious by the most uncomfortable seats in town. Still, one does not mind physical discomfort, for this is theater in the making and art does not come easily. We shall pay for our attendance in numerous ways.

We were told as much by the obviously talented founder of the theater, Celia Merrill Turner, who gently accessed us before curtain and during one intermission. Besides giving us some theatrical notes on the drama and the playwright, she urged, ya impertuned, us to "take part."

## Review

SHE SAID that the performers had given their hearts and we needed to "give something" back. My own feeling was that audience participation has to grow naturally and can't be forced. Still, she established a good spirit in the room.

Wilder, himself, wanted to implicate the audience in his work. Therefore, the play is interspersed with up-front stage chats and direct confrontations with those in attendance, seemingly totally apart from the acting. These asides, in addition to intentionally missed lines and cues, tended to make me nervous.

Partially, this is a tribute to the author, but also the stage was set by an opening in which real lines were muffled.

The play itself is a kind of all-encompassing history of the total Universe. It takes a five-part Everyperson through the most dramatic stages of

the ice age, the 40 days and 40 nights of rain, the war.

The characters are interesting because they seem to represent every aspect of human nature. "We are your hope, your despair—you," we are told.

INDEED, WE SEE man the Creator, Man the Destroyer, and Woman the Nurturer, Woman the Seductress. In a way, the five main personages could be a composite of one single character.

We all have creative, destructive, nurturing and seductive qualities. This very fact adds life to a play which, while entertaining, somehow fails to deliver a message of any real substance at the conclusion.

The actors, for the most part, were grand. The husband and wife team of Dike and Dee Dwellley would add grace to any production. They have a refined, professional, Shakespearean quality about them. Dee Dwellley's splendid voice and timing are uncommonly natural, hence breaking down the footlight barrier.

Her deep tones added force to the character and belied the Edith Bunker household look of the '40s. Dike Dwellley has a slight theatrical flair which seems most appropriate. He made the audience more aware of the medium but also elicited a real appreciation of it. Together they are a beautiful blend.

Lisa Andrews as the seductress started out a bit truculently, perhaps in a desire to project, but had some fine moments also. Her style was patti.

PHIL MONTGOMERY and Todd Haak as the two children were nicely breezy. One was not surprised that the boy had to be admonished to "control" himself and the girl to "clean" her characters well.

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