

Thursday, March 31, 1983 O&E

'Unexpected Guest' delivers excitement

Performances of "The Unexpected Guest," mystery by Agatha Christie, continue through April 17 at Meadow Brook Theatre on the Oakland University campus near Rochester.

By Helen Zucker
special writer

Where there's fog, unexpected corpses, unbalanced brothers, tweedy widows, inspectors and unidentified plotters, there's Agatha Christie. Murder in large houses is her special territory, and the Meadow Brook production of Christie's "The Unexpected Guest" is absorbing.

The plotting is so fine that even the slow pacing doesn't affect it much.

review

Terence Kilburn manages to direct this terribly British mystery in an offhand manner, but Christie's crisp dialogue, her dry humor and several actors manage to rise above the direction.

Peter W. Hicks' set is superb. Those important, beautiful French doors are in just the right place, and the stuffed heads of game animals from African safaris hanging above Richard Warwick's gorgeous study in South Wales lend the sinister echo necessary to the action. Everyone in the play is game at some point.

Tom Mahard as "a nasty bit of goods" in his nurse/valet outfit steals the show. Mahard looks like a reincarnation of the gifted comic, Marty Feldman.

AS HENRY ANGELL, the blackmailing, smiling valet, Mahard jerks about the stage looking like Igor in Mel Brooks' "Young Frankenstein." Far from being out of tone, Mahard adds the most and raises the level of the production considerably.

He's skinny, pleasingly evil, has a wonderful, "Just doing my job, sir," air about him, even while attempting blackmail. His ambition to run a "little place for alcoholic gentlemen" seems to suit him.

Tom Hazelline as Sergeant Cadwallier, who recites Keats, writes bad poetry, lets the Inspector answer the telephone and has opinions about everything, is totally believable. He's even brave.

George Gitto is authoritative as Inspector Thomas, who has to put up with Cadwallier and all the others. Gitto treats his role with a fine edge of impatience, quite suitable in light of all the inefficiency and madness.

Phillip Locker as nervous Julian Farrar, the politician running for election at an "unfortunate time" (he thinks his mistress has murdered her husband), smokes his way through his role. Locker is strong, if not quite "British."

NAOMI HATFIELD DOES a fine, fragile job as Mrs. Warwick, the mother of the murdered man. She's a woman with secrets of her own. Hatfield looks great in belted tweed suits.

Mary Pat Gleason is strong as Miss Bennett, the devoted nurse and household manager. "Benny" has a good scene with Richard Blumenfeld, who has the toughest role in the play — Jan Warwick, the frightened, sick brother of the corpse. Blumenfeld manages to



George Gitto is Inspector Thomas, Barbara Barringer is Laura Warwick, and Phillip Locker is Julian Farrar, who find themselves involved with a mysterious death in Agatha Christie's "The Unexpected Guest" at Meadow Brook Theatre.

be scary at the right time. On second thought, perhaps George Spelvin has the toughest role. Spelvin plays the corpse. He says nary a word and manages to sit without moving a muscle, slumped over with his back to us as the late Richard Warwick.

Barbara Barringer looks dramatic, dressed to kill in a black evening gown and pearls, holding a pistol at the opening. Needless to say, she couldn't have done it since she says she "did it" right

out of the bat. Barringer looks grief-stricken throughout, though there are moments when joy would've been appropriate.

Peter Brandon is cute (of all things) in the large, talky role of Michael Starkwelder. Brandon, who has much cause for grief, manages to be downright amusing. He seems to enjoy leap-

ing out into the consuming fog. He has good lungs. Some of the actors coughed.

Well, this season began in thick fog ("Macbeth"). Perhaps Meadow Brook is under some compulsion to fog up the stage? I can't wait to see the final production this year. Perhaps the whole theater will fog up.

Lettermen, Freshmen to open Variety Series

Meadow Brook Music Festival has announced Friday and Saturday Variety Series attractions for the 1983 season at Baldwin Pavilion on the Oakland University campus near Rochester.

The Lettermen and the Four Freshmen will appear in the opening Friday concert, June 24. Richard Hayman will conduct the Detroit Symphony Orchestra Pops at the first Saturday concert, June 25. The program features the "1812 Overture" with cannons and laser lights.

Other artists on the Friday Variety Series I include Roy Clark, Cleo Laine, Tony Bennett, Chuck Mangione, Teresa Brewer and Frankie Laine, Mitch Miller, Al Hirt and Woody Herman, and B.J. Thomas.

Artists on the Saturday Variety Series II include the Rovers and Tom

Paxton, Harry Belafonte, Kris Kristofferson, Lou Rawls, Andy Williams, Preservation Hall Jazz Band, Morton Gould and the Romero Quartet, and Bill Cosby. The DSO Pops will be featured on three Fridays and three Saturdays.

BESIDES THE Friday and Saturday Variety Series, the festival offers Thursday/Sunday symphonic concerts and children's concerts, plus many non-series specials.

All concerts are at 8 p.m. in the pavilion, with entrances on Walton Boulevard and Adams Road. More than 7,000 people can be seated in the pavilion and on the lawn.

Information on season subscriptions and a brochure will be available after April 1 by calling the Meadow Brook Box Office at 377-2010.

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