

Slice-of-Southern- life entertains

Performances of the Birmingham Theatre production of Beth Henley's "Crimes of the Heart" continue through Wednesday, Feb. 22, at the theater, 211 S. Woodward, Birmingham. For ticket information, call the box office at 644-3533.

By Barbara Michals
special writer

The Birmingham Theatre production of "Crimes of the Heart" compares favorably to its Broadway counterpart. The principal roles are well-acted, the set is an exact replica, and the direction, by Greg Johnson, shows no marked differences.

In Beth Henley's Pulitzer-Prize-winning comedy, three wacky sisters reunited under less than happy circumstances in a small Mississippi town, reveal their "crimes of the heart."

"Crimes" is an entertaining slice-of-life play with no discernible message, just three intriguing characters left to rattle around, get on one another's nerves and ultimately recapture their sibling rapport.

Each of the McGrath sisters is having a bad time of it. Spinsterish Lenny (Leslie Ann Ray) is having a 30th birthday almost no one remembers, her pet horse was just killed by a lightning bolt, and her beloved ailing granddaddy has had a near-fatal stroke after she made a birthday wish to put him out of his misery.

MEG (MICHELLE SEYLER) is the free-wheeling rebel who ran off to Hollywood to pursue a singing career. That career now dead-ended, she is uncomfortable with reminders about her promiscuous past and dashed hopes.

Babe (soap opera star Genie Fran-

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cis), the youngest and prettiest, was married at 18. Now, six years later, she has just shot her husband, the town's most prominent citizen, ostensibly because she couldn't stand his looks or his voice. It is this current crisis that brings Babe and Meg back home.

Ray brings a tender-wistfulness to Lenny, making her sympathetic and believable. Though seemingly the most levelheaded of the girls, Lenny has her share of eccentricities and smoldering resentments.

As Meg, Seyler visibly reacts to the claustrophobic atmosphere of Hazzard, Miss., with a nervous restlessness. Her pacing, smoking, and endless nibbling complement the overall excitability she so ably projects.

Francis does a competent job in her stage debut as the daffy Babe. Her little-girl innocence and vulnerability work just fine, though at times she could use a bit more zip.

WILLIAM KUX is delightful as Barnett Lloyd, the awkward young attorney hired to defend the remorseless Babe. Though amusingly smitten by Babe's charms, Barnett turns out to have a surprisingly cagey mind under all that puppy love.

Katie McDonough does respectable work as Chick, the McGrath girls' snobbish cousin, but she's not nearly as cleverly obnoxious as she should be. David Hayward is affable enough as Doc, one of Meg's old boyfriends.

By the play's end one learns why



Flavio Varani and Joyce Weintraub-Adelson were paired in an Oakway Symphony piano concert Sunday at Southfield-Lathrup High School.

Pianists display flair, elegance

By Mary Jane Doerr
special writer

review

apply to her, however. She showed evidence of being a fine soloist, too. Her skill as a duo-pianist was the key to a successful performance.

POULENC was described recently by John Simon in Opera News as an "uncomplicated Christian, apolitical boulevardier, and cheerful homosexual." This music is unmistakably "Poulencian." It's an incomprehensible mixture inspired by Balinese influences, baroque in convention, using the Bach and Mozart formula for two pianos, with allusions to Stravinsky's style. How is that for confusion?

The concerto was composed in 1932 while the team's encore, the second movement of the Sonata for Two Pianos, was composed some 20 years later. The Varani-Adelson team performed this hymn with the richness needed to give warmth to the religious quality that Poulenc's music had incorporated by 1952. It was lovely.

The Oakway Symphony Orchestra rose to the occasion and provided the orchestra accompaniment suited to its guest artists.

Glinka's Overture to "Russian and Ludmilla" was a spritely choice of opener for the concert, a fitting combination with Dvorak's Symphony No. Nine, or the New World Symphony. Di Biasi took the pace of the Glinka at a rapid clip, which enhanced the music and the performance. His interpretation of the Dvorak symphony was sensitive, moving and inspired, though the quality of the brass and winds didn't match the strings. Barbara Grover performed the second-movement English horn solo with grace.

With the superb rendition of Poulenc by the Varani-Adelson team, the moving New World Symphony and the exquisite programming of Di Biasi, this was the best concert of the Oakway Symphony season so far.

As a SOLOIST, Varani is steadily gaining popularity, though only recently has he been performing literature that profits from his style, like Prokofiev's Second Piano Concerto he performed last fall in South America.

Having been unfavorably impressed with Varani's summertime duo-piano partnership at the Bay View Music Festival, I had a heightened interest in this team. Though I still consider Varani a soloist, this alliance with his Oakland University colleague proved to be an exciting one.

Joyce Weintraub-Adelson was every bit Varani's equal and more. The two were nothing less than sensational. The blend of style, intonation, rhythm and interpretation made the separation of artists indistinguishable as at 8:30 p.m. Adelson is skilled as a specialist in duo-piano. She traveled as a team with her sister in Europe and the U.S. until her sister's illness halted their career.

I don't think the saying, "If you can't play one piano you play two," would

dents and ensembles from the Independent Schools in the area will be presented from 2-4 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 5, in the free Sunday concert series in the center mall at Somerset Mall, Troy. Other concerts this month will include the Flute Quartet with a classical repertoire Feb. 12, the Marvin Kahn Jazz Quartet on Feb. 19 and classical string ensemble Musique Unique on Feb. 25.

● **SOUPY SALES**
Comic Soupy Sales, famous for his pie-in-the-face routines, will perform Friday-Saturday, Feb. 10-11, at Marlowe's nightclub at the Vineyard restaurant, 29110 Franklin Road, Southfield. Dinner is at 6:30 p.m. with the first show at 8:30 p.m., or dinner at 9:30 p.m. with the second show at 11 p.m. Tickets are \$37.50 per person for dinner and show. Show only is \$12.50 in advance. \$15 on the day of the show. Tickets are available at Marlowe's.

● **ORIGINAL MUSICAL**
"Family Love," an original musical by Robert L. Douglas, will receive its premiere performance at 8 p.m. Monday-Tuesday, Feb. 6-7, at Varner Recital Hall on the Oakland University campus near Rochester. The show is a highlight of the university's observance of Black Awareness Month. The work is being presented by the OU Creative Players Guild, with music and lyrics by students Byron Johnson and Christopher Knight. Tickets are \$5 general admission, \$1 for students and senior citizens. For ticket information call 877-3533 or 854-3222.

● **FREE CONCERTS**
Performances by individual stu-



Genie Francis (left) and Michelle Seyler portray two of the three sisters in "Crimes of the Heart" at the Birmingham Theatre.

Babe shot her husband, why Lenny shuns serious involvement with men and why the girls' mother hung the cat alongside her when she took her own life. The laughs have been numerous but gentle and offbeat. It isn't very lightning for a Pulitzer-Prize winner, but it has a bizarre charm.

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upcoming things to do

● **ACTORS ALLIANCE**
Tom Eyen's bizarre comedy "Why Hanna's Skirts Won't Stay Down" will be presented by the Actors Alliance Theatre Company at 8:30 p.m. Friday, Feb. 3, at Lyceum International, Evergreen and 13 Mile Road, Southfield. Performances are at 8:30 p.m. Fridays-Saturdays and 6:30 p.m. Sundays through March 4. Tickets are \$7-\$9. For reservations call 642-1326. The box office is open from 2-6 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday and from noon to curtain time on performance days.

● **MUSICAL OASIS**
Good Company will play Renaissance music on period instruments from 2-6 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 5, at the Sunday Afternoon Thing at the Musical Oasis, 1610 S. Woodward, two blocks north of 14 Mile Road, Birmingham. The Real Happy String Band, a four-piece group which does a wide variety of traditional and popular music, will be the attraction on Sunday, Feb. 19. For more information call 540-4155.

● **CASTING CALL**
The First Theatre Guild will hold tryout for "Belles on Their Toes," the sequel to "Cheaper by the Dozen," at 2 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 5, at Knox Auditorium, First Presbyterian Church, 1669 W. Maple, Birmingham. Tryouts also will be held at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 7, in Calvin Hall. There are no roles for anyone younger than 8. Performances will be held April 27-28 and May 4-5. For further information call 642-6374.

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