

Meadow Brook breathes life into 'Candida'

Performances of the Meadow Brook Theatre production of "Candida" by George Bernard Shaw continue through Sunday, April 15, on the Oakland University campus near Rochester. For ticket information, call 377-3300.

By Cathie Brudenbach
special writer

The solid directing of Terence Kilburn and the fine cast in George Bernard Shaw's "Candida" make this squeaky-clean Victorian love triangle interesting to modern audiences. Even though times have clearly changed since Victoria's day, Shaw's satire keeps its cutting edge, and his wit still entertains.

In the play, a callow young poet named Eugene Marchbanks is smitten by Candida, an "older woman" who happens to be the wife of the parson, the Rev. James Morell. Joey L. Golden plays the 18-year-old poet, Marchbanks, with boyish exuberance. He's a shy, eccentric fellow in love with love. The English are historically fond of eccentrics as long as they're harmless. Marchbanks is a likeable oddball, although he doesn't seem enough of a man to woo the capable Candida away from her husband. In fact, he's a silly boy.

For that matter, all the men in the play are silly boys who depend on the good sense and compassion of Candida and the organizational talents of Miss Proserpine, the Rev. Morell's secretary.

WILLIAM WRIGHT as James Morell is a respected clergyman, an eloquent speaker or a moralistic windbag, depending on point of view. He sees the world with the cheerful optimism common to small boys and good Christians. Candida is the rock that supports his universe.

review

Barbara Barringer has the necessary presence as an actress to play Candida, another woman of great presence. Even when her would-be lover confronts her husband, she handles the situation with calm good sense and kindness.

The social critic in Shaw couldn't resist a chance to take potshots at the follies of men. In "Candida," Shaw takes his digs at clergyman and socialists, as well as at industrialists who get rich on the suffering of others and on self-important men who think they run the world.

Shaw knew better. He must have been a closet feminist. If he were writing today when feminism is more accepted, he'd be making barbed comments about self-important feminists making fools of themselves.

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"Candida" is the most often produced of Bernard Shaw's 29 major plays, perhaps because the temper of his barbs and clearly enjoys his characters. In addition to the three who make up the lovers' triangle, "Candida" has three thoroughly engaging minor characters.

MARY BENSON who plays the Rev. Morell's secretary is a delight. She takes the stereotype role of skinny spinster and creates a comic personality to remember. The prim and proper lady who gets tipsy on champagne is now a hackneyed dramatic situation if there ever was one. Benson infuses the scene with wonderful nuances and makes it rise above stereotype.

Candida's father is a blustery old codger who comes to visit. There's a good bit of Eliza Doolittle.

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the pragmatic daddy in Candida's cockney father. He's a rich industrialist with no apparent moral scruples. William Le Massena plays him masterfully.

The Rev. Morell's assistant, Lery, is another charming small boy in grown-up disguise. Thom Haneline plays him with puppy-dog faithfulness. He's an earnest good fellow who admires the Rev. Morell and thinks Candida beautiful.

The play, "Candida" shows a forgiving side of the sharp-tongued Shaw. Although Candida's world may not quite be "the best of all possible," it would be comforting to live among these gentle innocents.

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