

Cockroach, cat are charming

Performances of "Archy and Mehitabel" continue through Saturday, Dec. 8, at the Theatre Guild in Redford. For ticket information call 538-5678.

By Bob Weibel
special writer

Billed as a back-alley opera but in fact a jazzy musical, the Theatre Guild of Livonia-Redford's "Archy and Mehitabel" is delightfully different and charming from beginning to end.

This offbeat little musical recounts about the most fanciful love story imaginable — the whimsical tale of a cockroach (Archy) and his unrequited passion for a sexy alley cat (Mehitabel) on the steamy side of the big city in Shilohville Alley.

There is the barest of plots. And it requires a few moments to get into the spirit of things and accept humans cavorting about as insects and cats.

Once the show is underway, Michael J. Phillips (Archy) and Sandy Martin (Mehitabel) create two fascinating characters. Neither is blessed with rich, full voices. It matters little, however.

Phillips as a post-philosopher soars to dreamy heights writing free verse and sinks to a forlorn little cockroach when his attempts to change the ways of the amoral alley cat fail.

MARTIN'S MEHITABEL is the epitome of a feline who can't say no. She purrs. She sneaks about. She falls

review

for every line. And in the big city that means trouble.

A tryst with Big Bill, the local tomcat, leads to a litter of kittens. And Big Bill, played impressively by Timothy Gerrard, brushes her off with a, "See you later."

Tyrone T. Tattersall, acting coach and seducer of stray cats, tells her to hit the street after she fails to understand the "inner rhythm" of Shakespeare. Don Piper is a bowl and in fine voice as the frustrated maestro.

John Sartor gives a nice reading as the Newspaperman/Narrator. Perhaps a more Runyonesque quality, however, would give the role an added dimension.

Debi Brown dances beguilingly as the Lightning Bug. And Susan Gorski, Patricia Jones, Maxine Parshall and Dennis Remer brighten the stage as Mehitabel's Cohorts.

Music is first-rate, with conductor Lee George at the keyboards and synthesizer, together with percussionist Dave Powers.

Kudos to Charles VanHoose, making his directorial debut, for making this little musical a grand evening of theater.

Bob Weibel of Westland is a freelance writer who has spent more than 25 years in community theater as a director, designer and performer.

Rare works highlight musical tour

By Avigdor Zaromp
special writer

The second part of a musical tour of Europe, offered recently by Chamberworks, was one trip that even an average person could afford. The event, which drew a respectable-sized audience, took place at the Guild Hall, Christ Church Cranbrook on Nov. 16.

To be sure, no local musical event could match an actual European tour. This program, however, presented by Chamberworks director Thomas Kuras and a small chamber group, provided an evening of adventure and learning, which is a good return for the modest ticket price.

The group has two new violinists this season — Victoria Hattom and Mary Richards (with only Richards participating in the latest event). Other players were cellist Paul Willington, who has been with the group since its inception, and visiting artist Carol Perkins, flutist, who has performed with this group before.

Another newcomer to the group is an instrument — a two-manual harpsichord that was custom made for Kuras. This instrument, in addition to being versatile, projects a tone with great intensity, making it possible to perform with other instruments on close to equal terms.

MOST COMPOSERS on this program are virtually unknown. Among them were Heinrich Albicastro, Franz Xaver Richter and James Oswald, representing Switzerland, Moravia and Scotland, respectively.

Works by another one, Johan Helmich Roman, have been on previous Chamberworks programs. He is sometimes referred to as the "Swedish Bach." One of the movements of his D major Sonata on this program bore a striking resemblance to a movement from a Recorder Sonata by Handel.

Buxtehude, Domenico Scarlatti and Telemann were the better composers on this program. With the exception of the two Scarlatti sonatas,



Avigdor Zaromp

the other works were also new to most listeners.

Many works from countries such as Sweden and Denmark are neglected, Kuras said, because musical scholars are unfamiliar with these languages and are less likely to do the necessary research.

While THIS may be an obstacle, one could also contend, as I do, that these works aren't in the same league as those by more traditional composers. This doesn't alter that, for the most part, these works provide enjoyable listening.

With the illuminating background provided by Kuras, such a program becomes a stimulating venture and a

valuable learning experience, even if the music isn't on a par with the established masterpieces.

Some occasionally approach that level. One work on this program, the Dextera Suite in B minor by Telemann, is entitled to top honors among these selections.

The next Chamberworks program, "Salute to Mozart," on Friday, Jan. 18, will take place at the Bellam Art Center of Troy.

upcoming things to do

● EMU PRODUCTION

A 1984 Chasseneville High School graduate, Kurt Fretwell, will appear as a guard in English playwright Jackson Lacey's Russian folktale, "The Prince, the Wolf and the Fire-bird" in Eastern Michigan University's December production at EMU's Quick Theatre in Ypsilanti. Fretwell, an EMU senior and Theatre Arts major, is the son of Charles and Sharon Fretwell. Showtimes are 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, Dec. 7-8, and 2:30 p.m. Saturday-Sunday, Dec. 8-9. For tickets call 487-1221. Children under 14 are \$3 for all performances; adults \$8 evenings, \$7 matinees.

● CASTING CALL

Plymouth Theatre Guild will hold auditions for the comedy-drama "Crimes of the Heart" by Beth Henley at 7 p.m. Monday-Tuesday, Dec. 3-4, at the Water Tower Theatre on the campus of Northville Regional Hospital. Cast consists of four females and two males, ages 24-50. Anyone interested in auditioning or helping out behind the scenes should call 453-8396 for more information.

● IN PLAY

Michelle Lytle, a junior at Madonna College in Livonia, who is from Columbus, Ohio, stars as Sarah, a

student at a school for the deaf, in "Children of a Lesser God," at 8 p.m. Wednesday-Saturday, Dec. 5-8, and 2 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 9, at Adray Auditorium of the MacKenzie Fine Arts Center in Dearborn. The production is presented by the Performing Arts Department of Henry Ford Community College. George Popovich, the

director, worked with Plymouth resident Kim Willett, a sign language instructor who holds a bachelor's degree in sign language from Madonna College. Tickets are \$6 general admission, \$5 for HFCC staff and students and \$4 for senior adults. Tickets may be purchased at the door.

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