

Some good performances in 'Night of the Iguana'

Performances of the Birmingham Village Players production of "Night of the Iguana" continue through Feb. 8 at the playhouse, 752 Chestnut, Birmingham. For ticket information, call the box office at 644-2075 anytime.

Like the captured iguana scuffling at the end of its tether, the main characters in "The Night of the Iguana" are lost souls dangling at the end of their ropes.

The Birmingham Village Players' current production of the Tennessee Williams drama features some good performances but is generally uneven.

"IGUANA" is a difficult play, somewhat murky and convoluted in its message, and certainly not Williams at his best.

Set in a seedy hotel in a small Mexican tourist town in 1940, the protagonist, the Rev. T. Lawrence Shannon (Tim McGee) is locked in battle with his private demons while the audience is periodically reminded of the larger war raging worldwide.

Locked out of his church years ago for preaching heresy, Shannon now

escorts tour groups in Mexico. As the play opens he is sick with fever, at bitter odds with his current tour group, and seemingly on the edge of a recurring nervous breakdown.

On opening night, Jan. 31, McGee began flat and unconvincingly except during occasional outbursts of anger. By the second act he warmed to the role and improved tremendously, his impassioned torment became more believable.

At the hotel, two women begin a tug-of-war over Shannon's soul. The hotel owner, Maxine Faluk (Ann Weisman), is an impoverished widow who has capitulated to the simple pleasures of sex and alcohol. She wants Shannon to accept his failings and join her in a life of hedonism.

A PENNILESS traveler stranded at the hotel, Hannah Jelkes (Leisa Marie Pulico), sees Shannon as a kindred spirit and wants him to keep fighting to survive as she must do for herself.

Weisman is appropriately full of bonhomie and has a boozey, laidback delivery, though her Texas accent never quite sounds right. Pulico is excellent as Hannah, a complex character who displays both a soft



Barbara Michals

empathy and the world-weary tightness of someone who must portably scramble to survive.

Hannah travels the world with very elderly grandfather Nno (Howard Beer), a one-time poor poet. To earn their keep, the old

recites poetry to hotel guests while Hannah tries to sell them sketches and watercolors.

JOAN REDDY is very credible as Miss Fellowes, the no-nonsense spinster who leads the tour group's insur-

rection against Shannon after he has seduced a young girl in her charge.

Among the supporting cast, Boris Sellers is good as Jake Latta, the tour guide sent to replace Shannon though he's a little seedy around the edges himself.

Having the quartet of German tourists repeatedly goose-stepping across the stage seems ludicrous and detracts from the impact of their lines as they delight in the progress of the war.

While director William McCall gets uneven results from his cast, the production is very good visually and

technically. Sid Britten's set design is lushly tropical. The thunder and lightning effects are exceptionally realistic, and the impressive wall of water for the tropical storm at the end of Act One merits the round of applause it receives. Even a real live iguana is used.

Barbara Michals is a retired Southfield English teacher. A theater critic for the last 17 years, she is an inveterate playgoer who regularly catches up on all the New York productions.

table talk

Charley's Crab

Birmingham resident and Grey's Crab pianist Bob Seeley III again be the only American pianist featured at the annual boogieed stride piano festival at the Hoteletia in Paris, Feb. 14 and 15. Seeley has been the featured pianist

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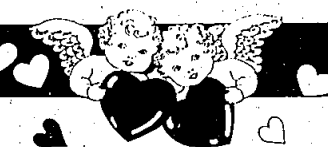
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