

THEATER

Troy Players show strength with 'Steel Magnolias'

Troy Players presents "Steel Magnolias" 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, April 16-17; 2 p.m. Sunday, April 18 at Hamilton Elementary School, 5625 Northfield Parkway, Troy. Tickets \$10 available at the box office prior to each performance, or call (248) 879-1285.

BY MARY JANE DOERN
SPECIAL WRITER

Showing a bit of mettle themselves because they're operating without a permanent perform-

mance space, the "portable" Troy Players is presenting a two hankie version of "Steel Magnolias" by Robert Harling at Hamilton Elementary School in Troy.

"Laughter through tears is my favorite emotion" says the wisecracking owner of Truvey's Hair Salon, which pretty much sums up this female "True Girl" kind of show.

In the three beauty shop town of Chinquapin Parish, La.,

Truvey and her new partner, Annelo, style more than hair at Truvey's salon. In four "snapshot" scenes covering three years of life in the small southern town, they help fashion the lives of the town beauty, the town social leader, the town millionaire and the town curmudgeon. One might get the idea that all the socially prominent do in this socially insignificant haven is get their hair and nails done. But these women,

with all of their love of gossip, frivolity and pink fingernail polish, are hard as nails.

Jacquelyn Arno plays the Southern magnolia Shelby, who is not very bashful. Arno has feeling and enough light heartedness to tickle an audience pink, bringing more tears for the finale.

Sandy LaDuke, a newcomer to the stage, plays the difficult role of M'Lynn, Shelby's mother. She plays the final scene with

understanding -- a credit to her.

As Shelby says, "It is better to have 30 minutes of something wonderful than a lifetime of nothing special." Mary Ligotti-Hitch has something special to offer as the awkward, nervous, but very appealing Annelo. The holy roller Annelo could have been an offensive part, but Ligotti-Hitch's interpretation is sincere not judgmental.

As the eccentric millionaire Clairee, Andrea Willis is priceless especially opposite the obstinate Ousier, perfectly played by Gloria Buoncompagni.

Buoncompagni delivered some very funny lines inoffensively, a real trick.

Pulling this all together with her magic wand and a lot of fairy dust and pastel paint, was set designer/publicist/director/producer! Sandra Guest.

Guest also directed these eccentric characters. Then in an emergency, as the understudy for all the parts, she donned a blond wig for the Dolly Parton role of Truvey.

It may seem like a one woman show but with this fine cast, Sandy Guest as Truvey has some real soul food to serve up.

'Studio cast earns high marks with 'Roses'

Wayne State University's Studio Theatre presents the Pulitzer- and Tony Award-winning drama "The Subject Was Roses" Thursday-Sunday, April 15-18. Show times are 8 PM Thursday through Saturday, with a 2 p.m. Sunday matinee. The Studio Theatre is in the basement of the Hilberry Theatre, 4743 Cass Ave. at Hancock on the Wayne State University campus, Detroit. Tickets are \$8 (general admission), \$6 (students and seniors). To charge tickets call (313) 577-2972.

BY SUE SUCHIYA
SPECIAL WRITER

Frank Gilroy's drama "The Subject Was Roses" chronicles a returning World War II veteran's struggle to re-establish his identity in the post-war period and to make peace with his parents, whose previously poor relationship has deteriorated in his absence.

Set in the West Bronx in May 1946, the returning infantry corporal must redefine his relation-

ship with his parents, and deal with the explosive anger in their marriage. His parents must learn to accept their son as a man and not as the boy who left for war three years earlier.

As the Cleary family struggles to reconnect as a family, they don't reach perfection, but take steps toward achieving stronger emotional bonds. Each must mend damaged relationships. They are trapped in a self-defeating cycle of hurting, appeasing and grudging compromise. By the end of the play the son and parents have learned to accept each other the way they are, instead of trying to impose their personal vision of how the person should be.

The scenes are well written and move quickly, which keep the play from being dragged down by the heavy duty emotions inundating the stage. The actors rise to the emotional and psychological challenges of the script as well, an element crucial to the production's success.

Jason Smith of Garden City is

superb as Timmy Cleary, the returning Army corporal. He personifies both the eager but uncertain son and a self-confident man. His face mirrors his emotions well, especially when he's hit by his parents' bitter crossfire. And whether sober or inebriated, he projects the son's longing, anguish and desire for peace with his parents.

The parents, John and Nettie Cleary, are played by Dejan Radovanovich of Livonia and Christy Bonastell of Zeeland. Radovanovich is captivating in his ability to swing from nice guy to angry, unreasonable despot. He displays a skillful grasp of the wide range of emotions the father uses to psychologically manipulate both the mother and son.

Bonastell is able to accomplish the tricky task of displaying emotion on her face while maintaining the self-restraint expected from women of her era. While she captured the mother's anxiety and anger well, the makeup team needs to age her fairly — she looked more like her son's

sister than mother.

Technically, the show established a wonderful mood with the tunes of Glenn Miller reverberating from an old-fashioned radio, and the set — an apartment interior — reflected careful attention to detail, right down to a worn sofa and a period phone.

Christy Bonastell's costumes were flattering and well coordinated with matching purses and shoes appropriate to the immediate postwar period. Smith's Army uniform also fit him well, and was neat and pressed.

The props were a mixed bag — hit or miss. While great care was taken to maintain period accuracy in many respects — including brown beer bottles with tops requiring a bottle opener — an unstable rose vase, a crucial prop, toppled to the floor prematurely, making Bonastell's subsequent hurling of the vase across the room anti-climactic. And the prop crew used tall tumblers instead of small juice glasses for a conspicuous inch of orange juice.

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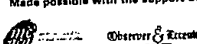
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