

Entertainment

Growing up is hard to do Spring play tackles some very real gender issues



Something to shout about: A frustrated Mary Kay Davies endures an explosive outburst from her theatrical husband R.J. Novack.

by Jon Flick
The Collegian

The Matchbox players have a hit on their hands with Howard Korder's "Boy's Life" and "Middle Kingdom." Director Stephen Buckwald demonstrates prowess in theatrical elements, while the cast's spectacular performance has sold-out audiences not only rocking with laughter, but also contemplating their emotions as sensitive issues surfaced.

To put it bluntly, if you've ever been curious to find out what good theater is, go see these two fine productions.

Those familiar with theater and lay-people alike will appreciate the straightforward plots. Nothing is hidden from view here, and the humor is very blatant. Each character has qualities everyone can empathize with.

"Middle Kingdom" is a one-act play concerning a married couple who are experiencing financial difficulties. The setting is a kitchen at 2:00 a.m., and the husband (R.J. Novak) is questioning the purchases of his wife (Mary Kay Davies). What ensues is a hilarious tumult, with more than a hint of irony.

What an appropriate opener for "Boy's Life," where the laughs continue. The story centers around three aging college men who can't seem to

escape their glory days. Now they face the pursuit of modern women, which is a difficult one.

Jack (Assaf Jaffe), in particular, has trouble suppressing his childish tendencies and strongly encourages his friends, Don (Jamele Adams) and Phil (Barry Westcott), to follow him wherever he may go. Sex, drugs, and rock and roll are status quo.

Many men who see this play will feel as if they are looking into a mirror.

The women involved with Don and Phil (Bean Ward as Karen, and Teri Evans as Lisa) would certainly like to see their partners mature, but Jack adamantly forbids this. Tension manifests itself between the friends and their women. It's funny to see, however, that Jack has problems of his own, though he vigorously denies having any.

Buckwald describes playwright Korder as having

"an extremely perceptive eye."

"In this piece, he zeroes in on what guys really do talk about," the director continues.

Many men who see this play will be almost looking into a mirror. What is also very interesting is seeing the reactions of the women in the play as well. It is their strength which the men draw upon in their own lives.

Scene continuity (through ten scenes total), character movement, lighting and sound were excellent. A meticulous production staff establishes the mood very well. The music is a bonus, with selections from the Doors, the Rolling Stones and various other rockers.

That production achievement allows the actors to shine in their debut. It seemed like the entire cast was basically on key and comfortable with their roles. Hilarious, believable and profound are words that come to mind when describing the incredible opening night performance.

No one can be singled out as overshadowing the other actors. In a production where it might be easy for one character to overpower the others, that is a great accomplishment. They handled the arena-like stage with relative ease (see story at right).

"Middle Kingdom" and "Boy's Life" are definitely worth checking out.

Taking center stage

Theater "in the round" poses additional acting challenges

by Jon Flick
The Collegian

Viewers of "Boy's Life" and "Middle Kingdom" will immediately sense that these are no ordinary productions. Upon entering the studio theater, one might expect the typical stage-in-front, seats-in-rear set up (proscenium staging, as it is referred to).

What they will find is an arena-like setting, where the stage is in the center of the theater, and seats are on all four sides. This is commonly called "in the round."

What this means for the audience is that there will be no rushing to the front row to see all the action- it can be seen in all directions. Each actor and actress will be in view at any given time on stage, which leads inevitably to a more captivating production.

"To live up to that," says Barry Westcott, who portrays Phil in "Boy's Life", "the actors have their work cut out for them."

"Theater in the round will be great for the audience, but hilarious for the actors," he said, "because we have to use three to four times more movement."

That might surprise those who thought it might be easy to act in the arena stage. Actually, there is much more involved than merely memorizing lines and stage positions. "You can't move for movement's sake," said Westcott. "Each movement must have a purpose within the framework to the character. It's really tough."

This attention to body movement is critical in countering the only falling point of theater in the round, the fact that the actor's faces are not always visible to each member of the audience. Body movement must convey what a facial expression normally would. "As it turns out," said Westcott, "it will work out very well. Even though the audience can only see the face of one actor at a time, they can still sense exactly what the others are doing."

Considering that the actors and actresses must be funny in addition to being as technically correct as possible, this production proves to be quite a challenge.

"Boy's Life" and "Middle Kingdom" will be presented through this Saturday, April 13, and Wednesday, April 17 through Saturday, April 20, at 8 p.m. The Matchbox Players will also present Sunday matinees on April 14 and April 21, at 2 p.m.

Attila the Hun. Ivan the Terrible. Al Capone.
They were all seven once.



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PROBLEM CHILD

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