

Players present "Scratch"

Devil demands Daniel's defense

By B. J. STRODE
Critic

A spotlighted young man with a guitar crosses the stage in singing, "Neighbor, how stands the Union?" So begins the Aggie Player production of "Scratch," a play written by Archibald MacLeish and based upon "The Devil and Daniel Webster" by Stephen Vincent Benet.

An unlikely beginning for the story of a man's fight for his immortal soul. But somehow it works. The young man, Beau Sharbrough, is suitably solemn and quietly dramatic.

He also has a beautiful voice, which even in the quiet passages carries to the back of the theatre. The lyrics were supplied by MacLeish, but the music was composed by the singer and subtly sets the mood for what is to follow.

What follows is a PERFORMANCE! Technically, the show is near-perfect. The sets were constructed under the direction of Brian McPherson, Jim Thomas and Walt Meissner. Confusion was caused by a too-modern chair and what seemed to be black bushes in the first scene, but the second and third scene sets were great. Concentration was hampered by a few missed light cues, but these will undoubtedly be corrected before the show opens, and the lights were well-designed and effective.

I especially enjoyed the eerie green glow that accompanies the arrival of the jury, and the blood-red aura signalling Scratch's departure.

A respectful salute goes to Margaret Thomas and her crew for an outstanding job on costumes. They are historically believable, using earth colors that complement the tone of the play as well as the deceptive simplicity of the set.

One masterful touch was dressing Scratch all in white, an unexpected and highly effective contrast to his role and to the other actors.

Also excellent was the ghostly garb of the jurors, although Judge Hathorne appeared to be wearing his grandmother's nightgown.

Another highlight of the technical aspect was the make-up, deftly applied by the able and no doubt dirty hands of Marc Chaloupka and Lanya DeLong.

Daniel Webster needs to look a little older and Jabez Stone a little younger, but the really fantastic work was done on the jurors. They did indeed look "dead and damned."

Any small children in the audience are likely to have unpleasant

memories of the 13 lost souls filing onto the stage from the back of the theatre, shrouded in ghoulish green and staring vacantly from disfigured faces.

The perfect touch was achieved on Scratch himself, whose wickedly slanted eyebrows and distinguished graying temples demonstrate the power of creative make-up to enhance a well-defined character.

Not to be outshone by backstage excellence, the actors are to be congratulated on a fine performance. Jim Burford is suitably desperate and frightened as Jabez Stone, the hapless seller of his soul. His plea for mercy in the second scene could use a little more pizzazz and the recitation from the witness stand should be filled with utter despair.

But Burford has a good sense of character and adequately portrays a man who has lost everything and can't quite accept the finality of it.

Another director might have used

Jabez Stone as comic relief with greater success; however, Burford's Jabez is well-done and believable.

Daniel Webster is powerfully portrayed by Phil Hafer, whose size is in his favor. There are some weak moments, however. Phil has some trouble keeping his voice in the dominant, authoritative range most fitting for a famed orator.

He tends to whine during emotional speeches and becomes unintelligible when excited. The worst few minutes of an otherwise admirable performance occurred during a long recitation at the trial.

Hafer needs more variety in his delivery and more commanding presence to combat the distracting movements of the jurors.

Mitch Hall should get a rose for his characterization of Scratch. He is consistent, convincing and deliciously sinister, while at the same time managing to be likeable.

In his dazzling white suit and beautifully appropriate make-up, he

presents a truly striking picture and one that is enhanced by his delightfully wicked laugh. I loved him.

A special accolade goes to Steve King for his credible representation of the indomitable Judge Hathorne. All in all, it is a good show.

Robert Wenck has done a fine job of weaving the plot, characters, and other elements of the art into a coherent fabric.

A less easily satisfied viewer might wish that such talent, energy and devo-

tion would be applied to a more relevant drama.

The overriding message, pounded home in speech after long-winded speech, is that Americans are better than everybody else and have somehow become gods themselves. However, there might be more to it than that.

As one of the actors expressed it between scenes, "This play is basically about the dangers of charge accounts."

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Associated Press
CHICAGO — Chicago police arrested a woman carrying a gun Tuesday night outside the Conrad Hilton Hotel 12 minutes before President Ford's arrival by motorcade, but the Secret Service said it had nothing to do with Ford's visit.

The woman, identified by Presidential Press Secretary Ron Nessen as Carmen Theresa Pulido, was arrested at 6:02 p.m. across the street from a rear door of the hotel at Eighth Street and Wabash Avenue. Ford entered the building at 6:14 p.m.

Nessen said the Secret Service had questioned the woman, then said it was pulling out of the case. Nessen quoted a Secret Service agent as saying: "The incident is of no interest to the Secret Service and the episode has been judged to have nothing to do with the President's visit."

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