

Trite and saccharine, but very funny

# Fantastick odds for play

By B. J. STRODE  
Contributor

Anytime I leave congenial surroundings to attend a play I have always considered trite in a theater that is air-conditioned to about 40 degrees Fahrenheit, and end up enjoying myself, little short of a miracle has occurred.

That was indeed the case on Thursday night when I attended the opening of the Aggie Players production of "The Fantasticks" in the MSC Ballroom.

Directed by Bob Wenck, the play is still too saccharine for my taste, but very funny. As is appropriate for a play of this genre, there is very little character development. The roles are stock types rather than individuals. Two characters who did seem to evince autonomous personalities were Bell, played by Bruce Kates, and Henry, portrayed by James Hall. Their antics contrasted with, but in no way detracted from, the stock characterizations of the rest of the cast.

The show got off to a slow start but picked up rapidly. The first character we meet is El Gallo (Michael Wilson), who looks as seductive in the first act as he proves to be in the second. Wilson is fatally charming as the narrator/bandit in spite of a certain immaturity of voice which would better suit a younger role. He sings well and combines a man-of-the-world flair with an irresistible little-boy-lost innocence. The effect is altogether pleasing.

In the role of Matt, the boy next door, Brian McPherson is pompous, poetic and frequently ridiculous — the perfect adolescent suffering his first love pangs. He seemed to be having some throat trouble but he didn't allow it to interfere with his singing. More than any other player, his voice fit his role, and he was at his best when in the midst of song.

Boni Petersen appeared as Louisa, the sweet young thing with

just a hint of budding sensuality. She captured the essence of the love-struck teenager, alternately starry-eyed and coquettish; all in all, Petersen and McPherson made an adorable couple. Boni has a remarkable voice that has obviously been trained, but was too heavy for such a frail, young character. She also had the misfortune of being required to sing a lot of "Ah's" in various emotional states. This phenomenon reached its epitome in the second act with "Round and Round," a predictably redundant number with a lot of wordless vocalizing.

Bruce Kates as Bellomy and Philip Hafer as Huckleby portray the respective fathers of Louisa and Matt. They form an admirable team and have the benefit of some of the best choreography in the show. Though most of the play is uninterestingly blocked, Hafer and Kates won a warm audience response for their fancy footwork in the second act performance of "Plant a Radish."

Henry and Mortimer are two down-and-out entertainers hired by El Gallo to assist in the abduction of Louisa. Henry (James Hall) does recitations and Mortimer (Thomas Owen) does death scenes. Both are delightful, and each does a fair amount of scene-stealing. Hats off to The Mute. Without speaking a word, she must react to the other players and convey a sense of her "self" to the audience. She does a pretty good job, but in my opinion, The Mute should be a non-character, neither acting nor reacting to anything that goes on, and above all remaining unobtrusive. However, that is a directorial decision and Watts does the best she can with a well-nigh impossible task.

The MSC Ballroom requires, if anything, more ingenuity than does the Forum. The set, as far as I can tell from the program, was designed

by Roy O'Valle and constructed by Jane Vanore and Marla Hammond. It is simple and functional, although the post at each corner may well have obstructed someone's view.

Costumes by Shirley Kitzman and Nancy Gandy were appropriate in all but two cases. Louisa should have worn a more realistic dress to match Matt's natural look. And The Mute should have left her skirt in the storage trunk. Otherwise, everyone was dressed to fit his or her part.

Walt Meissner headed the light crew for the show. He and whoever helped with the make-up are to be congratulated on the undetectability of their work. With the exception of Louisa's too-heavy make up, all the players looked like regular people, which in this play is a desirable effect.

The major faults in the show are not directly attributable to the Aggie Players. The theater was much too cold; the play — in spite of its record-breaking Broadway run — is still trite, and there is a dearth of interesting movement. An outstand-

ing exception to this latter complaint was the fight scene between the would-be abductors and our hero, Matt.

One shortcoming, however, is with the actors themselves. Though all were capable of performing their songs, there was very little blending of voices. Hafer consistently overpowered the others, whereas Kates could scarcely be heard. McPherson and Petersen especially sounded much better alone than in tandem.

My personal "worst moment" of the evening occurred during the performance of "It Depends on What You Pay." A sense of humor is fine, and certainly nothing should be sacred to the satirist; but "The Fantasticks" is not satire, and light hearted references to rape in that song destroyed much of its humor for me.

The play ended happily for all, not least for those of us who rushed eagerly into the hot night to thaw out. The Aggie Players have overcome fantastic odds to bring you a pleasant evening.

## Researchers return from West Texas

Twenty Texas A&M University researchers return to Bryan - College Station this weekend for a short break in an archeological dig in West Texas near Del Rio.

Students and faculty from the dig, plus a number of students from A&M's first archeological field school nearby, will have to readjust to walking on level ground after weeks of scaling rugged canyon country at the site.

This year's investigation at the dig, a large cave, has been funded by the National Science Foundation. NSF's \$54,900 grant for the project

is the largest single aid ever awarded A&M anthropologists.

Just before striking camp for the break, researchers were excited to find one almost perfect arrowhead to add to the volume of other artifacts and material recovered, some of it as old as 9,000 years.

A comprehensive study of the cave's inhabitants — including what plants of the area were important and what state of health the nomads exhibited — is underway.

The field school, which runs through Aug. 13, is being held in conjunction with the excavation.

## A&M's Texas Clipper arrives back home

Texas A&M University's T/S "Texas Clipper" arrived back home Sunday completing the final leg of its centennial-bicentennial cruise with a jaunt from Freeport with more than 200 special guests aboard for the one day outing.

The 173 cadets of Texas A&M's Moody College of Marine Sciences and Maritime Resources arrived in Freeport at 7 p.m. Saturday, an hour ahead of schedule, and were greeted by parents, friends, wives and husbands as the ship docked in the Brazos harbor. Many of those who were there to welcome the Aggies boarded the vessel the next day, along with 228 invited guests, for the final journey home.

The "Clipper" sailed from Galveston June 6 and had covered 6,019

miles when it returned. Ports of call this year were Boston; Halifax, Nova Scotia; Washington, D.C.; New York; Charleston, S.C.; New Orleans and Freeport.

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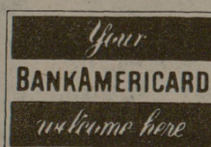
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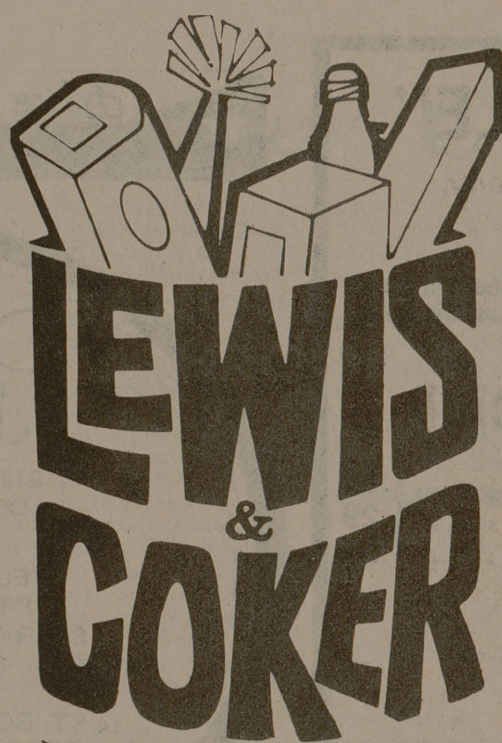
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