

# A look at theater, art, Theater program still somewhat unknown

by Bonnie Langford

Battalion reporter

With the start of a new season, members of the theater arts program are looking forward to a good year, but few other students at Texas A&M even know the program exists.

"I always think about Horton Hears a Who," says Vicki Anderson, a senior theater arts major, "but we're the ones on that fluff yelling and no one at A&M knows we're here."

The theater arts degree is relatively new. The English department did not offer the degree until 1977, but interest in theater has been with Texas A&M since its beginning.

In 1893 the first group of students interested in theater organized the College Drama Society. Interest in drama never waned, but groups changed. Play groups lasted only from season to season until 1946, when the Aggie Players formed. And with Aggie Players came a desire for theater courses.

"The demand began for (theater arts) courses in the early

1950s," says Robert Wenck, associate professor of English and faculty adviser for Aggie Players.

The Aggie Players and the theater arts courses offered by the English department eventually evolved into the theater arts degree.

So, two outlets are available for student involvement in plays: through Aggie Players and through the theater arts program. The Aggie Players' first production — "Cowboy Mouth" by Sam Shepard — will be presented Oct. 8 and 9. The theater arts program's first production is running now.

Non-theater majors who want to participate in productions may do so through Aggie Players, which is now the student organization for the theater arts program. But the theater arts program also allows students in other majors to work with productions, says Mary Anne Mitchell, assistant professor of English who is in charge of voice, acting and directing for the theater arts program. Students may audition for parts or help with the sets and costumes, she says.

Anderson says in drama, students have to be involved.

"You have to be dedicated," she says, "because it takes a lot of time. We're supposed to spend 30 hours a week on production."

Mark Mitchell, another student in the program, agrees that it is very time consuming.

"This is your life," he says. "It cuts into your study time and your social life. Practices are held for three hours every night of the week except Wednesday."

Anderson says with four productions this school year, the theater arts program doesn't waste time. Tryouts for the first play, "What the Butler Saw," by Joe Orten, were held the first week of school. The play opened Wednesday night and runs through Saturday.

The other three plays to be produced in 1983-84 are: "Summer and Smoke" by Tennessee Williams, "Romeo and Juliet" by William Shakespeare and "Death Takes a Holiday" by Alberto Casello.

Mary Anne Mitchell says students will compete in the American College Theater Festival in October with "Summer and Smoke." The competition

allows students to see what other schools are doing in drama, she says. Texas A&M students will compete at the area level at Lubbock in acting, set design and costuming.

Anderson says acting is not the only thing students in theater arts learn. The department produces everything from costumes to sets for the plays.

"The degree isn't too specialized," she says. "We're supposed to do everything. We have the facilities to teach all the areas of theater. We even have a sewing classroom with six sewing machines for costuming. The only hassle is not having the facilities close to the theater."

Wenck, who does most of the directing for the productions, says Rudder Theater's distance from the theater arts facilities is a problem, as is having to share the theater with other groups and events.

"It's not like when we had Giunon," Wenck says.

Giunon Hall was the first auditorium at Texas A&M. It was built in 1916 and housed the Aggie Players' productions and practices. The building was razed in 1971 to make room for Rudder Theater Complex,

where the theater arts productions are given now.

Mitchell says the money to fund all the theater productions, which provides practical experience for the students, comes from the English department, season subscriptions, advertising sales and University Bookstore funds. Season subscriptions offer four productions for the price of three. Subscriptions are: \$9 for students, \$10.50 for faculty and \$12 for others. Texas A&M students may also become a patron for \$25, a sponsor for \$40 or a benefactor for \$60.

Enrollment in the program has doubled in the past three years, she says, and this probably will continue. This growth has been a factor in wanting a separate department, she adds.

"There is a proposal to originate a department of speech communications and theater arts for next semester," she says. "It is currently being reviewed by committees for approval."

A college of fine arts may even appear in Texas A&M's future, Mitchell adds hopefully. Already, she says, little pockets of fine arts courses have appeared.

It looks like Texas A&M may soon hear Whoville.

## Lack of visual arts studies a 'disadvantage'

by Robin Black

Battalion reporter

Student interest in art at Texas A&M has grown rapidly in the last few years, as indicated by enrollment in visual arts classes and participation in student art organizations. But some professors involved with art-related classes see a need for much more.

Environmental design professor Joe Hutchinson says he feels that the lack of visual arts classes at Texas A&M is a disadvantage to the University.

"There is a need for a visual studies program here," he says. "Visual arts is a natural outgrowth of an environmental design program such as the one here at Texas A&M."

Hutchinson says the University is losing potential students because of the lack of a visual studies program.

"I've received many letters from high school students who want to come to Texas A&M," he says, "who are interested in a visual studies program. Since we don't have one here, the only thing I can do is recommend to

them one of the other universities that does have that kind of a program."

Dr. John J. McDermott, distinguished professor of philosophy and medical humanities, who teaches a course entitled the Philosophy of Art, says he deplores the lack of arts courses offered at the University.

"A University like Texas A&M should have an arts program," McDermott says. "Arts should be the at the center of a university. A university without the detail of art is not a university at all."

Among the art classes offered at the University, which Hutchinson describes as "very limited," a student may choose from such topics as art history, painting, photography or philosophy.

Most of these courses, Hutchinson says, are "sandpaper" courses — they tend to take away students' rough edges and deal directly with their feelings.

In the courses, he says, a student learns about other people and their differences.

"To survive in this world," he says, "we must understand how

other people live, and that they are as rich and varied as we are."

The type of visual studies program needed at Texas A&M, Hutchinson says, would be about 50 percent technical, with courses in such areas as computer graphics and the general technical courses required in the environmental design curriculum, and the other part of the program would deal with subjects such as painting and art history.

Several attempts have been made in the past to implement visual arts programs at Texas A&M, all of which have been University-approved but were turned down by the state Coordinating Board for colleges and universities.

The reason for this, Hutchinson says, is Texas A&M has always been primarily a technical school, noted especially for its engineering college. Any kind of arts program probably would be thought of as incompatible with the University's technical curriculum.

"Since similar programs already exist at the University of Texas and some of the other state institutions," he says, "the Coordinating Board sees the extra cost of implementing a visual studies program at Texas A&M as unnecessary."

Hutchinson says some stu-

dents begin undergraduate study in the University's environmental design program and end up transferring to another university because Texas A&M does not offer the visual studies courses they need for their future careers.

Of the arts classes offered now, Hutchinson says most of them fill up during spring registration. Enrollment has expanded to about 65 students per class in some courses, he says.

That is encouraging, he says, because the University only began offering courses in visual studies about seven years ago.

Hutchinson says he foresees Texas A&M adopting some kind of visual arts program in the near future.

"If A&M is ever to become a world-class university," he says, "we will have to implement a visual studies program. And now would be the perfect time to do so, because right now A&M has the money, the strong following, and a more sophisticated student body."

Until more arts courses are available at Texas A&M, students will have to be content to take what is offered. For those who are not able to take a formal art class, however, involvement with art still is possible.

The MSC Arts Committee, an organization that works to bring visual arts to the University, is open to anyone interested in working on the committee.

Arts Committee chairman Wendi McDonough says the organization's primary goal is to increase student awareness of art by bringing art exhibits and collections to the University, sponsoring student art contests and bringing speakers in to talk about art and related subjects.

McDonough says she feels that the exhibits increase students' insight on people and cultures outside their geographic area and helps them to appreciate different ideas and opinions.

Student interest has increased in this organization, also, and membership has grown to about 30 students.

Outside interest in the committee also is growing, McDonough says.

"We have people calling in frequently from places like Houston who want to know what kind of exhibits we have planned," she says.

Other arts-related organizations include MSC Town Hall, MSC OPAS, MSC Basement, MSC Camera Committee, MSC Aggie Cinema and MSC Cepheid Variable.