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Whatever happened to Baby Jane?

Stage Center answers question with 'Baby Jane' performance

BY BRIAN FLEMING
The Battalion

Henry Farrell's 1962 film *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane* has long since found its place among American classics. It is the story of Jane Hudson, a forgotten child star, her struggle with her invalid sister and her loss of sanity.

For 37 years, *Baby Jane* has been known to critics and fans alike as a horrifying psychological drama with an almost cult-like following.

After the film's release, this "summer-camp thriller," as it has been called, quickly found its way to the performance hall in a theatrical adaptation by Jimmy Schooley.

Stage Center, in downtown Bryan, during the dark season of Halloween, will feature the classic tonight through Saturday night under the direction of Christopher Westling.

Westling, who has been involved in numerous productions at Stage Center, said the production lives up to its classic movie status.

"It is just a frightening and scary play," Westling said.

Baby Jane explores a wide array of themes ranging from family disputes to the dark underbelly of man's nature.

Tracy Johnson, playing Elliot McDowell, said the idea of sibling rivalry is still present.

"It is an interesting study on the two sisters," Johnson said. "How they deal with each other, how they communicate with each other, and how they deal with each others' successes and failures."

Suzanne May, playing Minnie Gordon, said another theme of this play is the interplay of emotions between people.

"It is an interesting look into blame, guilt and responsibility," May said.

Joshua Campbell, playing Edwin Flagg, said the play portrays darker emotions.

"It truly shows the dark side of human emotion and contains a lot of dark humor, as well."

Leah Fletcher, who stars as Jane Hudson, said Stage Center features a play coinciding with Halloween each year. *Baby Jane*, she said, is similar to productions of years past.

"Last year, for example, we did *Frankenstein*," Fletcher said. "This play does the same in capturing that sort of desperate feeling."

The desperate atmosphere comes courtesy of one character's descent into madness.

"Jane Hudson basically loses her mind," Fletcher said. "Her grasp on reality is very tenuous, and it gradually slips away."



"Baby Jane" performers are (left to right) Cathy McWhorter, Tracy Johnson, Suzanne May, Leah Fletcher, Kurt Swick and Josh Campbell. They will perform Thursday through Saturday.

Whatever Happened to *Baby Jane*, once only a classic movie, makes a smooth transition to stage.

"In the film, there are a lot of outside scenes we can not do here in the theater, but there really is nothing anyone is going to miss."

Westling said the progression to stage complements the film.

"This adaptation is very true to the mood and theme of the movie," Westling said. "It is not the movie and we did not carbon copy it, but I feel it still carries the same weight as the original."

Westling said *Baby Jane* on stage does justice to the original actresses, as well.

"The movie originally featured Joan Crawford and Bettie Davis," Westling said. "This production, I feel, pays tribute to those great actresses."

Cathy McWhorter, president of Stage Center, said Stage Center tries to put on a wide variety of productions.

"We try comedies, and we try drama," McWhorter said. "We don't always do a show that is necessarily safe, either."

McWhorter said *Baby Jane* is not one of those "safe" performances.

"There is manipulation, violence and hate,"

McWhorter said. "When you see it, you can't initially understand."

Westling said directing *Baby Jane* is a new plateau in his involvement with theater.

"I have been on stage a total of two years here at Stage Center involved in the process of [theatrical] production," Westling said. "For me, this is a logical progression."

Westling said directing *Baby Jane* is a rewarding process.

"It is a lot of hard work," Westling said. "The reward of seeing these actors turn around and act out something I originally envisioned in my head is very cool."

For any director, another true reward is a show, itself.

"We have worked very hard to make a great production," Westling said. "Despite the work, I think we will have a very nice show."

Westling said grabbing the audience's attention is one of his goals for this production.

"I want to scare everyone," Westling said. "After all, it is a heavy show and I want everyone to feel the intensity. And with all things considered, I also want everyone to enjoy themselves."

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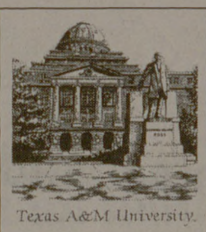
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