

arts

Raleigh production of 'Mame'

Musical features good performances

By Martha Johnsen

For all those buffs of the old musical *Mame*, now running at Raleigh Little Theatre through June 7, is a must.

The Broadway hit is the story of the life-loving Auntie Mame who raises her orphan nephew during the Depression. Under the skillful direction of L. Newell Terrant, the never dull *Mame* is the perfect entertainment for an otherwise slow-moving summer evening.

Mame is played with bursting enthusiasm by Phyllis Thompson, a drama instructor at Meredith College. She projects well, but her style is often too abrasive for softer scenes.

The role of Mame includes many

difficult songs but Thompson carries them off with finesse. And nowhere does Thompson's skill show so well as in her solo, "If He Walked Into My Life," a sensitive conveyal of the endless dilemmas of child-raising.

Hank Perkins, who plays young Patrick Dennis, Mame's spoiled nephew, deserves a solo bow for his fine performance. His voice is exceptionally strong and clear for a sixth-grader.

Bobbie Armstrong, the Brooklyn native who portrays Agnes Gooch, touches the funny bone of the RLT audience. In Armstrong's transition from a bespectacled timid and naive nursemaid to an experienced and expecting "bachelor-girl," she doesn't miss an opportunity to

milk a simple stage line for a chuckle-producing innuendos. And Armstrong's singing contributes much quality to the songs sung by Mame's small household, such as in the well-known "We Need a Little Christmas." What's more, she seems to enjoy herself on stage.

theater

Other notable performances are given by Juanda Holley as Vera Charles, famed actress and Mame's bosom buddy; Charles Barrett as Beauregard Burnside, a Southern gentleman who rescues Mame from poverty and marries her and Helen Crisp as Mother Burnside. Also commendable are: Jason Perkins as Mame's great-nephew Peter Dennis; Gesche Metz as Gloria Upson, Patrick's despicably spoiled fiancée; and Doug Richmond, as a too tall but lovable Ito.

Roy Dicks, who plays Mame's nephew Patrick as an adult has a tough role in

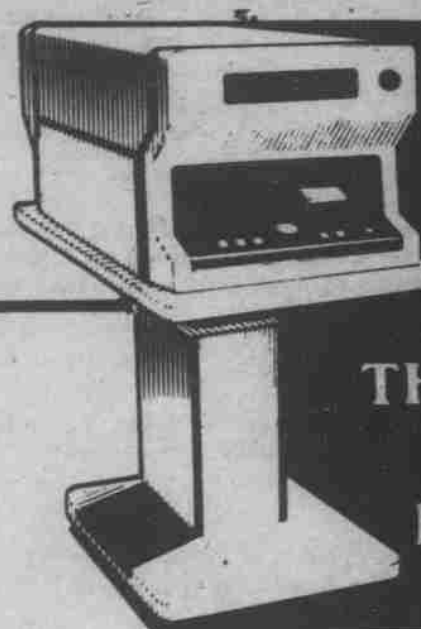
following the heels of the endearing young Patrick, but Dicks commandeers the switch smoothly.

The ensemble is impressively versatile in their song and dance style. Choreographer Kathleen Tart utilizes the play's performers' skills in everything from ballet to the Charleston to rigorous modern dance. And though the dancers occasionally lack in precision, they make up for it in effort.

Overall, the ensemble sang well; their version of "Mame," the play's best known song, was especially charming. Music director, Alan Neilson conducts both the vocalists and the small but substantial pit orchestra with skillful coordination.

John Hodges, the scenic and lighting designer for the play, nicely balances the simple and the elaborate. The costumes by David Hearn manage to capture both the era and the region the play is set in.

The Raleigh Little Theatre's production of *Mame* is charming entertainment well worth the short trip to Raleigh to see it.



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'The Force' blends old, new

HOLLYWOOD (AP)—"The Force" is with us again.

"The Empire Strikes Back"—the sequel to the most successful film in history, "Star Wars"—blends old and new elements in its story.

To begin with, producer-creator George Lucas has subtitled the movie "Episode V" and says there will be seven other *Star Wars* films.

In addition, a Muppet plays a central role and the soldier-of-fortune Han Solo gains a larger part, one that includes some romance with Princess Leia.

What is the same is the avalanche of special effects and national attention.

In Hollywood, fans camped outside a theater for 36 hours to see the initial showing of the sequel.

One of those standing in the drizzle outside the Egyptian Theater, Terri Hardin, said the 36-hour encampment was not nearly as difficult as the three-year hiatus between films.

"We're waiting for our high. It's in that door. You know, we don't want anything

else. We don't need anything else," Hardin said.

"The Force is with us and it's going to carry us right on into that theater," she said.

It's that kind of fanatical devotion that enabled *Star Wars* to earn \$300 million in box office receipts since it was released in May 1977. And 20th Century-Fox officials say that kind of force portends success for the sequel.

"The contracts we have with theaters in the domestic U.S. market cannot return to us less than \$30 million," said Peter Myers, senior vice president domestic distribution for 20th Century-Fox. He said the film cost about \$25 million to make, excluding marketing costs.

That, in Myers' view makes *The Empire Strikes Back* about as close to a sure thing as anyone could ever get in the unpredictable film business.

Initial critical reaction is that the special effects of *The Empire Strikes Back* is superior to *Star Wars*, but that the plot is less satisfying because it obviously sets the stage for another movie.

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