

# Spotlight

## PlayMakers ushers in the season with 'The Nutcracker'



Susanna Rinehart, right, and Lynn Passarella in 'The Nutcracker'

### Lab play enjoyable despite minor flaws

Despite a few minor mud puddles, the Lab Theatre's production of Frank Wedekind's "Pandora's Box" is worth wading through because, in creating an atmosphere conducive to translation of the author's ideas, the theatre kept a majority of his poetry on dry ground.

This wasn't a minor accomplishment, as the dialogue and images of the play that contain that poetry were not derived from an objective reality but rather from the subjective eye of an artist who foreshadowed the expressionist and absurdist movements.

For the meaning of such a play to survive, the eye of the artist must be integrated with the eye of the audience. The Lab Theatre's production, which will continue through Dec. 5 at Graham Memorial Hall, had just the sense of poetry required by such a play.

The production began with a self-styled invitation for symbolic interpretation. Dressed in a fairy-like, multi-colored gown, sophomore Jennifer Davis, who played Lulu (Wedekind's Pandora), performed a dreamy and seductive dance while toying with a box which she revealed to contain a globe. Music by Kate Bush also lent an ethereal quality to this poetic prologue.

Contrasting slides of an adult and child female nude, lighting effects and an epilogue also helped create the otherworldly atmosphere this expressionistic play demanded.

But despite special, atmospheric effects, the sounds of poetry rang most memorably from the mouth of senior Quince Marcum, who played Alwa. The often philosophical lines of his character might have sounded queer and out of place, had not Marcum internalized them so thoroughly.

The broken and consciously meditative pace of his delivery, along with the brooding expressions of his face and gestures, gave his lines, which are some of the most important lines, a genuine feeling of truth and human tragedy.

The greatest difficulty plaguing both the actors and the audience was the demanding necessity for each of the six actors to play several parts. Though slight changes in costume helped identify new characters, the changes in characterization were often slight as well.

Sophomore John Freshley seemed particularly burdened. Though he convincingly played the principal part of Roderigo, a dim-witted womanizer and muscle man, his minor parts were less well-defined, especially his portrayal of the murderous Jack, which was more soporific than sinister.

On the other hand, sophomore Chris Patrick proved that while an actor's portrayal of several different characters can confuse and bore an audience when done poorly, it can also be an attention-grabber when done well. His portrayal of Cast-Piani, a sleazy pimp, was so effective with his silver-smooth speech, he seems to drip with slime.

Patrick's portrayal of Bob, a 15-year-old, came off comically because of his stomping, eye-rolling and other teenager-ish affectations.

Though Wedekind described the play as a tragedy, the presentation of its heroine, Countess Geschwitz, by junior Kristine Watt was of pathetic rather than tragic proportion.

When Lulu said the Countess once begged for a kick in the face, the audience believed her because Watt never

Christmas is coming soon, but at PlayMakers Repertory Company, the holiday has already arrived, and to celebrate the season, the company is giving a wonderful gift: absolute joy.

A holiday play is always a challenge, and after PlayMakers staged "A Child's Christmas in Wales" for the last two seasons, many people wondered if they could top it.

They have.

"The Nutcracker: A Play," which runs through Dec. 23, is a jubilant production that, despite its excessiveness, is one of the most charming and heart-warming plays the company has produced in recent memory.

The story breaks away from the traditional ballet and provides new dramatic form to the fairy tale by E.T.A. Hoffman. The action unfolds through a party at the home of the Stahlbaums, a poor but loving family, on Christmas Eve. At the party, an adolescent girl, Marie, is surrounded by various real life elements that transform into magic beings during her later fantasy. Her godfather, Drosselmeier, supposedly a judge in a far-off land, has come for the Christmas celebration.

He has brought Marie and her brother Franz a seemingly ordinary nutcracker that soon comes to life. Christian, once a gifted swordsman in the royal army, was transformed into the nutcracker by a turn of events precipitated by the evil Mouserinks. Marie, Franz and Drosselmeier, who also is a powerful magician, go on a quest to help Christian break his curse before midnight of Christmas, else he again turn into the doll for another hundred years.

The beauty of the play lies in its ability as a fairy tale to speak to a theater filled with adults. The story itself is not particularly out of the ordinary as far as fairy tales go. Good conquers evil, love reigns true, and everybody lives happily ever after. But in addition to its childlike appeal, the PlayMakers production has a powerful psychological richness to it.

Her fulfillment, as we remember our own need to be fulfilled. We cry at her disillusionment as we recognize our lost innocence. And we feel joy when she succeeds in finding happiness, as we are always searching for the happy ending. This play speaks to the child within us, and lets that child free for 90 minutes to run about in our own psyche. The members of the audience leave happy, refreshed and euphoric, their own senses of life affirmed.

The major flaw of this production is its tendency to hit the audience on the head with the action. Specifically, there is a point in the middle of the show where evil appears to be winning. Every two seconds, something bad happens to our heroes, and every two seconds, there is an explosive blast of "melodrama music" that indicates that, indeed, what is happening is really horrific. After five minutes of this, interest in new developments is lost. A fairy tale is going to have a happy ending, so we know that while the heroes may be

### Eric Rosen Theater

The underlying plot is of Marie's inner journey toward adulthood. Through the course of the play, the audience watches a child become an adult, and this is the real magic. The wizard comes into her life seeking her pure heart and gives her the capacity to love. In her quest for maturity, there is something almost tragic in her loss of innocence.

The whole fantasy can be viewed as a facet of Marie's imagination. Her archetypes of Love, Courage and Evil are larger than life, and her imaginative fulfillment is beyond the realm of intellectual reality. Her story comes from a pure heart and speaks to the heart of the adult, which comprehends beyond an intellectual level.

We cheer with Marie in the hope of her fulfillment, as we remember our own need to be fulfilled. We cry at her disillusionment as we recognize our lost innocence. And we feel joy when she succeeds in finding happiness, as we are always searching for the happy ending. This play speaks to the child within us, and lets that child free for 90 minutes to run about in our own psyche. The members of the audience leave happy, refreshed and euphoric, their own senses of life affirmed.

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### D'Ann Pletcher Theater

furnished them with evidence to the contrary. Her Countess was a whiny, pitiful woman with no self-pride.

The pathos of Watt's Countess detracted from any moral transcendence the audience might have experienced through the social statement attempted in the production's appended epilogue, which showed Lulu and the Countess united as lovers in the hereafter.

If the production failed to fully develop every character, it at least clearly portrayed Wedekind's modern idea that a subjective view of reality can be just as truthful as an objective view.

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having a rough time, they're going to be OK. The overkill is unnecessary.

Performances are extremely good. The stakes are high and call for a heightened sense of spectacle from the actors, and, without exception, they rise to the challenge. Lynn Passarella, who plays Marie, portrays her character with enough realism to make us realize that the child is not too sweet to handle but is a real and honest human being with whom we can identify.

Matthew Ryan is excellent in the role of the enchanted nutcracker. His fight scenes, especially the first, send chills down the spine. He is suitably endearing and dashing courageous as he battles evil and wins our hearts.

Drosselmeier, played by Ray Dooley, is enchanting and touching. He is the eccentric relative we all love, and he is the source of ultimate good for which we all search. Dooley mixes skill and talent in a memorable performance.

Special congratulations go to Susanna Rinehart, as Mouserinks, for making us believe that a true incarnation of evil can exist. Her physical acting is only surpassed by her vocali-

zations, as she shrieks and writhes in pure archetypal wickedness. Rinehart loses herself in the role, expending an enormous amount of energy that comes across fluently.

The technical aspects are at an all-time high for PlayMakers. The music used, except for the noted exception, is appropriate and fluent. Craig Turner's fight scenes are imaginative and breathtaking, as the whole piece moves about with precise and clever choreography. The set design and effects are equally spectacular. McCay Coble's costume design is absolutely the best work she has done for the company; the fantasy wardrobe created an aura so distinct the audience applauded character entrances for their costumes.

Director David Hammond earns a standing ovation. This play, which could have been a schmaltzy nightmare and a technical fiasco, is pure entertainment.

Exams are coming, and there may be no better solution to studying blues than this exciting and lavish fairy tale. After all, a story about true love, magic and happy endings may help us affirm that there is life after finals.

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