

A REVIEW

# Brunswick Players Pull It Off Again

BY SUSAN USHER

Over the years the Brunswick Players have gained a reputation for making the most of limited resources. With their current production of "Rehearsal for Murder," the Players do it again, combining new talent and a new location to provide an entertaining evening with their friends.

Audiences of an estimated 75 to 80 people each attended the first two shows last Friday and Saturday nights. Additional performances are scheduled Friday and Saturday, Nov. 18 and 19, at 8 p.m. in the old gym on the Brunswick College College campus, 8th & Lord Sts., Southport, a facility the Players would like to make their home.

An adaptation by D.D. Brooke of the teleplay by Richard Levinson and William Link, "Rehearsal for Murder" takes the form of a clever "play within a play" with an unexpected ending. Audience members are kept in suspense—and in the dark, literally and figuratively, throughout much of the two-hour show.

The play opens in a darkened theater on the anniversary of the death of Monica Welles. Welles was a well-known screen actress trying to launch a Broadway career at the time of her apparent suicide, which followed a cast party on the opening night of "Chamber Music." In an attempt to reveal the truth about his fiancée's death, which he believes was murder, playwright Alex Dennison has reassembled those associated with the play for the first "reading" of a purported new work, "Killing Jessica." Along with scripts he has packed a handgun in his briefcase.

Before the reading begins, a lengthy flashback takes the audience and Dennison's new secretary to the time of the murder, introducing the victim and the remainder of the cast, all of whom appear to be suspects with motives.

While building tension and laying the groundwork for what is to follow, the first act moves slowly. This was partly because of the very narrow apron of the stage, where much of the action took place. Because of the tight space and blinding glare of the spotlights, at times players hugged the draperies Saturday as they edged on and off the apron.

However, the Players make good use of a second, lower makeshift stage built below the apron.

Only for scenes relating directly to the night of Welles' death are a more elaborate set and lighting used. This set consists of a shimmering curtain and furniture and other props suggestive of a study opening off the star's bedroom and balcony.

Director Stuart Callari and her assistant, Jane Astoske, draw serviceable, if not remarkable, performances from leads Warren "Tex" Dorman and Jean Hrdlicka, both of whom make their acting debuts in the show. Both Yaupon Beach residents show lots of promise for future Players roles.

Dorman especially warrants

praise for his almost deadeningly calm portrayal of the intense screenwriter-turned-detective. As Dennison he has lines in every scene and delivers a difficult and lengthy near-monologue in the first act. While Dorman fluffed several lines Saturday, the damage was light and the action continued with little interruption. His understated interpretation of the character worked well, insinuating rather than shouting the screenwriter's cunning and compulsion. However, in the occasional scene that demands more overt power, he delivers, as in the closing moments of the first act, when he "confronts" the cast.

As a newcomer to the stage Hrdlicka handled well the role of Monica Welles, an apparently complex character who is part wide-eyed ingenue, part career-wise sophisticate.

Both Dorman and Hrdlicka projected their voices well and enunciated clearly. However, at least from one viewer's perspective, a huskier voice, greater emotional range and more stage presence would have been assets for the female lead, who is after all, we're told, a "star," albeit of the screen.

Delivering especially solid performances in their character roles are veteran performers Joy Boyette as the colorful producer, Bella Lamb, and Bob Maker as Lloyd Andrews, the director. While Lamb's figure was almost a caricature, until after intermission her lines didn't begin drawing the laughs they deserved from the quiet, but appreciative Saturday night house.

Filling out the cast ably were Ken Campbell as the arrogant but insecure David Matthews, an actor; Edie Shupe as Karen Daniels, Welles' understudy; and newcomer Tony Harris as the all-too-eager young actor Leo Gibbs.

Bekkie Bean makes the most of her part as Loretta, the stage manager, and Bob Penneck doesn't waste his

few lines as the moving man, Mr. Santoro. South Brunswick High School senior Briton Campbell was a perky Sally Bean, secretary to the playwright.

Bob Poulk and John Bean come across well in their surprise roles as the "man" and "second man" in the auditorium, and perhaps will be seen in larger roles in future productions.

Overall the Players pull an unusual amount of quality talent from the community for "Rehearsal for Murder." The only obvious disappointments in casting were minor. While neither Jim Bullock nor Misty Harrison played convincing police officers, both newcomers deserve credit for getting involved in the community production. Bullock auditioned on a dare from a friend, while Harrison is a South Brunswick High School senior who belonged to a junior high drama club in Durham.

Though always dependable, Players regular Patrick Connaughton was weak as Ernie, the stage doorman, and at times his lines were impossible to understand.

While the Players, like most community theater groups, need to keep striving for consistency, in "Rehearsal for Murder" they've put together an evening that won't disappoint their audience.

It's a long way from Broadway, but that shouldn't matter. A Players production is a time for residents across the county to come together for an evening of fun, and on a less obvious level, to reaffirm the importance of community. As Dennison tells his players early on, "Reunions are good for the soul."

Support local theater while scheduling your own reunion. Tickets for "Rehearsal for Murder" are \$5 and can be purchased in advance at First Step Computer Systems in Shallotte or Sears in Southport, or at the door. Season tickets for 1988-89 are also available for \$25 each; Players memberships are also available.

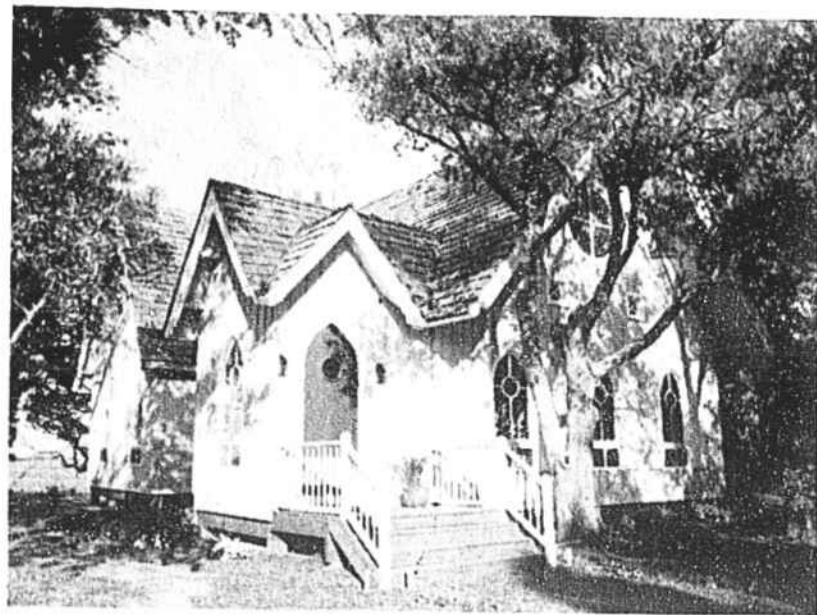


PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

### Chapel Design Cited

The American Institute of Architecture's Austin, Texas, chapter recently presented its annual church design award to Clovis Heimsath Architects for the firm's design of the Village Chapel on Bald Head Island. The award was the only one presented for a project outside Texas. The chapter's awards program covers buildings designed and constructed over the past three years.

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## State Transportation Board To Review 8-Year Road Plan

The N.C. Board of Transportation is scheduled to review a draft of the 1989-1996 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) at a committee meeting today (Thursday) in Raleigh.

The TIP is the department's basic planning document that sets highway construction priorities statewide. It is expected to be adopted by the board at its Dec. 9 meeting.

The draft will be reviewed this afternoon by the board's Finance and Programming Committee, following other committee meetings which begin at 9 a.m.

Also, the Right of Way Committee this afternoon will hold its second public meeting on a proposal to require setbacks for new billboards erected on the state's primary highways. Last month the committee held the first meeting on the re-

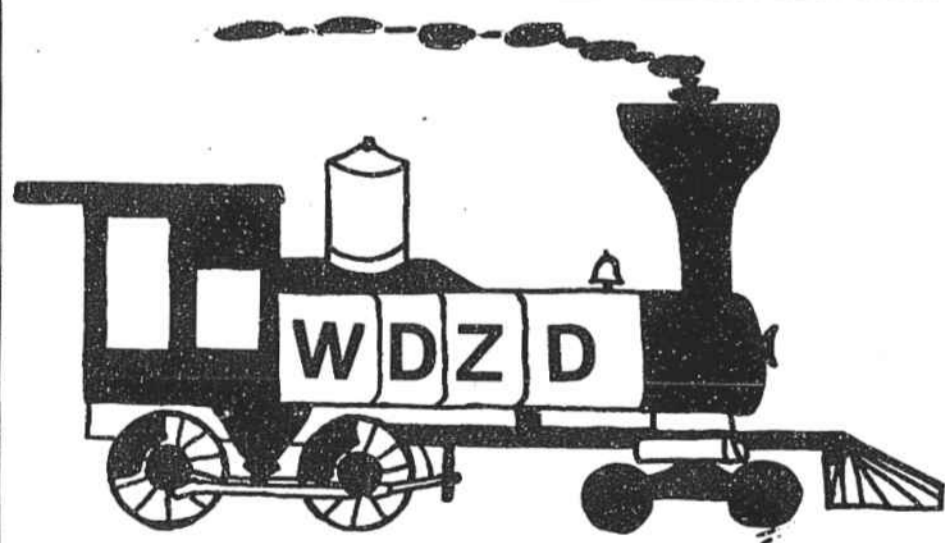
quirements.

The board's regular monthly meeting will be held Friday at 9 a.m. in Room 150 of the highway building in Raleigh.

Contracts to improve more than 365 miles of primary and secondary highways among \$17.5 million in highway projects to be considered by the board.

The contracts are for work in Durham, Granville, Person, Franklin, Vance, Warren, Wake, Bladen, Columbus, Sampson, Anson, Alleghany, Avery, Moore, Davidson, Forsyth, Lincoln, Rowan, Cumberland, Harnett and Robeson counties.

Board member Tommy Pollard of Jacksonville represents southeastern North Carolina, including Brunswick County.

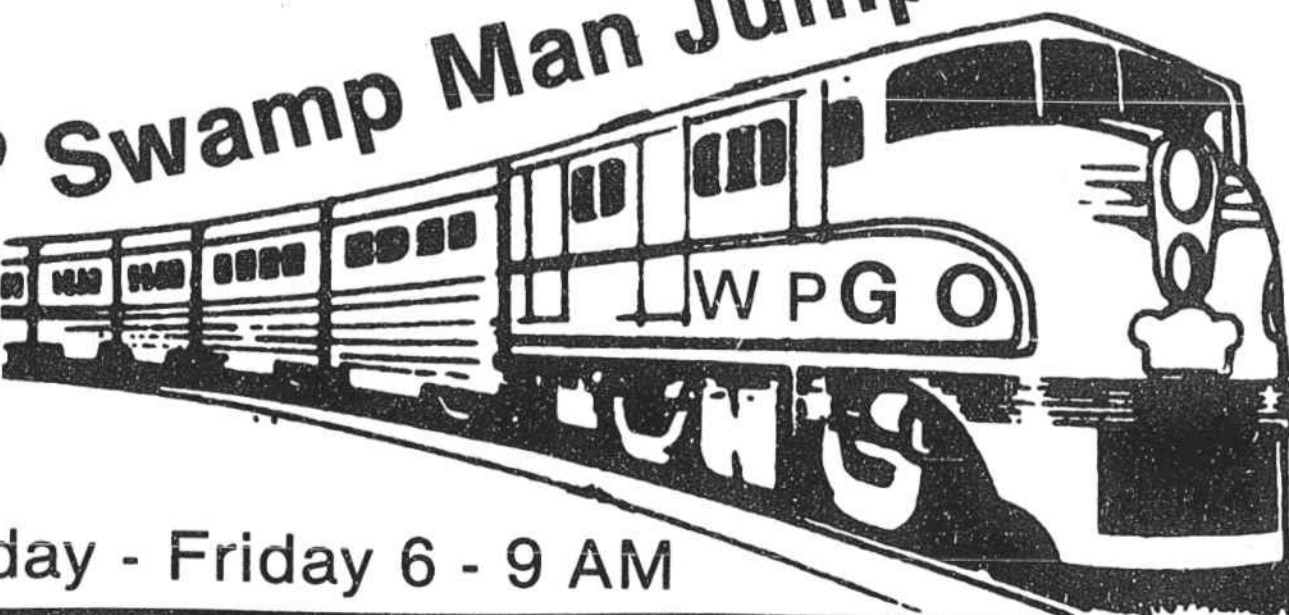


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