

Arts, Letters, & Entertainment

SCREEN DEMON



Knee-Deep in the Genre

Angela A. Lynch
Columnist

Right off the top, I must admit that the marketing for *Dead Again* got the better of me. All of the trailers that flashed across the television screen seemed to be edited so quickly — I figured the film's star and director, Kenneth Branagh, was up to something sneaky. And let's face it, a hard-core Shakespearean actor/director/megalomaniac tackling the American murder-mystery-romance genre seemed like too much excitement for this critic to take.

Opening in only limited release, *Dead Again* raked in an amazing amount of ticket sales, debuting as the fifth highest grossing film of that week. Needless to say, with an opening weekend like that, I was in the Raleigh-Durham area within the hour. And with the exception of the guy behind me describing the "gassy-belchy feeling" he had the previous night, the film proved to be quite an interesting adventure.

Branagh and his real-life wife, Emma Thompson, play two sets of lovers who are caught in a carefully woven tapestry of mystery, murder and reincarnation through the benefit of Karma — three cheers for SAGE 221. The tragic death of a concert pianist and the subsequent execution of her German composer husband in 1949 are the background and key to the mystery surrounding the modern day couple of a private detective and an amnesiac woman.

A fair amount of intrigue is apparent in the film; as are the many homages paid to Hitchcock and Welles through the music and obvious visual symbols (look for scissors — they're everywhere). Unfortunately in a situation like this, star and director Branagh will probably end up with all of the credit. But I think this film stands on its own because of screenwriter Scott Frank and editor Peter E. Berger. The structure of this story is so incredibly intricate it takes a few viewings to catch every detail that is there. The parallels between the two stories are right there in front of you — it just takes Berger's editing of the climax for it all to fall into place. Color me reminiscent, but the climax scene seems to be a tad similar to the battle of Azincourt sequence in Branagh's *Henry V*.

And now for the acting — in Branagh's case, let's just say believability of one of his two characters isn't too bad. I don't buy his American accent and he seemed to "click" better with the impassioned artiste character of Roman Strauss. Emma Thompson is acceptable, but Andy Garcia has got to go. Sure, he has a strong face for the forties era, but what kind of accent is he trying to pull off in that first scene? Sounds like the Godfather III voice inflections kicked in a year too late.

Thank God for Derek Jacobi. This acting legend makes a marvelous appearance in a series of bad suits and gets to recycle his famous I, Claudius stutter. Robin Williams also shows up (in a meat locker, no less) to put in another solid dramatic performance — rawly hilarious in one moment and starkly serious in another.

All in all, I think *Dead Again* deserves the thumbs up sign. Some people in the theatrical sphere would have me give Branagh the finger, but nonetheless, the entire production deserves a nice "golf clap" for dusting off an old genre and putting on a new shine.

MPAA: R General Cinema at Cross Creek Mall



Under the watchful eye of Mike Church (Branagh), Franklyn Madson (Jacobi) places Grace (Thompson) under hypnosis, which soon uncovers murder and mystery that has spanned two lifetimes. Photo courtesy of Paramount Pictures.

Cast for the Highland Players Run of Moliere's "The Miser" is Promising

Robert Novotny
Staff Writer

A showcase of acting talent will be on display Oct. 25-26 at 8 p.m. and Oct. 27 for a 2 p.m. matinee.

The Highland Players will present *The Miser*, a Victorian romantic comedy by Moliere. According to director Holden Hansen, "There are some extraordinary actors in this cast. Each one has a professional future, if desired."

Matt Sutherland takes the lead as the miserly Harpagon. Katie Watts plays his daughter Elise, while Michael Pesackis pursues her as Valere. Todd Rodriguez takes the role of Cleate as he romances Marianne, played by newcomer Nikki Holloway. Newcomer Tifani Christensen plays La Fleche. Hamilton Goodman is Jacques, Sean Nolan is Anseme, and Jason King portrays Simon and the Commissioner.

Kate Blackburn is the only community member of the cast. Blackburn, a teacher at Scotland High and a published poet with the St. Andrews Press, has taken advantage of this opportunity to capture the Frosine role. She rounds out a

cast that was so competitively read for that Hansen said that he "could have cast each role twice."

Hansen, a visiting instructor of theater, certainly qualifies as a fine judge of talent. The recent faculty addition holds a master of fine arts degree from the University of Texas. "Holden is a lot of fun to work with. He gives his actors a lot of freedom with characterizations," said Pesackis.

Hansen was originally drawn to North Carolina from Iowa by the Visiting Artist Program at Bladen Community College. With this group Hansen has played theaters ranging from the Spirit Square in Charlotte to the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C.

The selection of *The Miser* was a carefully calculated choice by the director. Hansen wanted a period piece that was not difficult in language or style, and with an unfamiliar core of actors to chose from he made sure to select something they could succeed at. Moliere was influenced by the Italian Commedia troupes of the 15th century, as well as by the comedy of the manners of his own time. *The Miser* leans toward the broad comic style of the

Commedia. Also, as *The Miser* favors of a broader comedic approach, the play may prove to hold greater appeal over its Parent's Weekend run.

"There are some extraordinary actors in this cast. Each one has a professional future, if desired."

The main storyline focuses on Harpagon's stolen cash box and his obsessive crusade to get it back. From there a web of comedic misunderstandings, just discovered relatives, and love triangles push the fast-paced plot to an occasional frenzy. The heavy balance of subplots grabs the playgoers attention, leaving little room to let the mind wander.

Set design will be an unusual aspect of the performance. By moving the stage partially out over the lower seats and seating a portion of the audience on the vacated stage, a theater-in-the-round will be created. Hansen has noticed a tendency for the cast to play only to the front, but feels rehearsals will ingrain the proper sight lines.

Taking a professional approach to handling rehearsal, Hansen demands punctuality and a high level of concentration. "They don't even know what their potential is yet. I'm excited to see how far this cast will come," said Hansen. With such a spirited group of actors being tempered by Hansen's experience, this cast should come a long way.

Tickets for all three shows can be purchased either at the door or in advance at the box office in Vardell, which is open Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., and from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. Prices are \$5 for general admission and \$3 for all St. Andrews students, faculty and staff.



Katie Watts (Elise), Todd Rodriguez (Cleate) and Matt Sutherland (Harpagon) rehearse for *The Miser*.



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