

'Liliom' Is Non-Shocking Love Story

By Beverly Wolter

Staff Arts Reporter

"A sentimental piece in an anti-sentimental time" is the way Robert Murray describes Ferenc Molnar's play "Liliom."

The play will open at 8:15 p.m. Thursday in the theater of the North Carolina School of the Arts. Murray is directing the show, which will be repeated at 8:15 p.m. daily through Dec. 11, except Sunday, Dec. 7, when it will be given at 7:30 p.m. Admission will be charged.

Murray and Charles Evans, head of design for the theater, have worked closely on the production. One of Evans' sets will include a carnival merry-go-round. The musical, "Carousel," was based on "Liliom." Music is used in "Liliom," but only for background.

"Most of theater now," Murray said, "is the theater of shock, of nudity, of the intellectual.

"In 'Liliom,' you really see a love story, where holding hands can mean as much as the more passionate behavior of people that is so prominent today in the movies and on Broadway.

"I think the theater in New York has reached an impasse," he said.

"Liliom," he said, is not one of those love stories where "you either see them in the sack, or you don't see what they see in each other.

"There's not a kiss in it. There's not an embrace. Yet it's a love story."

The play, he said, is a legend. "It moves in and out of realism.

"The simple truth of the play is that you can't always judge a man by his overt actions."

Liliom is a carnival barker, a rough but appealing man. He treats his wife, Julie, brutally at times, yet he loves her deeply. His behavior simply contradicts his intentions.

The name "Liliom" means "lily" in Hungarian — Molnar was a Hungarian playwright — and is applied "to a guy who's no good," Murray said.

But Liliom, he said, is "filled with the joy of living — he's a Zorba the Greek — the kind of man who rouses the envy and admiration of those who always do

the right thing" and follow the careers plotted for them.

Murray said he had a little trouble with his student actors' reaction to a fantasy scene in which Liliom is judged after his death and given a chance to come back to earth briefly to try to make amends for his previous faults.

"They tittered at the judgment scene," he said, but Murray stopped the mirth when he pointed out that the judgment scene, as far as reality was concerned, bore a close parallel to current devotion to the meaning of the signs of the zodiac, and to conversations related to extra-sensory perception and telepathy.

"This is the reality I hear in the cafeteria," Murray said. "An Aries shouldn't go with a Leo, or something like that."

He is using primarily sophomores and juniors in the play.

"I'm trying to get actors to know who they are, by playing something close to them in age," he said. They can come later to the classics of an earlier period.

Murray also said, "This is a show anyone can see — the children — the whole family. There's something in it for every age."

In his scenery, Evans said he aimed at providing a setting appropriate to people he called "simple, working class, marginal people who have largely disappeared in America. We all think of ourselves as middle-class Americans.

"This is something out of the past.

"These are hand-to-mouth people," he said.

To try to convey the idea, he said, he is designing the exterior of dwellings along the lines of gypsy wagons.

A number of sets are called for. The number has not presented as much problem for Evans as the difficulties offered by the theater.

"That old gymnasium doesn't make it easy," he said. (The theater is housed in a former gymnasium.)

"I'd like to get in a plug for that," he said. He would like to see better facilities to attract actors and designers.