

'Miracle Worker' Reviewed; Mizelle, O'Grady Acclaimed

By GARY CHRISTOPHER

When one begins a theatrical review, one often uses the convention of saying, "As the curtain rose on the opening night . . ." Sorry, folks. The Tank Theatre of Rocky Mount doesn't have a curtain; nor does it have an orchestra pit. But what it does have is a group of amateur actors that perform with the sensitivity of professionals. And it has a rather outstanding producer-director.

THE MIRACLE WORKER, the play which was presented at the Tank on Wednesday night and will continue through February 28, was in a word an outstanding production. The play by William Gibson chronicles the turbulent relationship between a teacher and a six-year-old deaf and blind child in the 1880's. The world now knows that this relationship between Helen Keller and her teacher Annie Sullivan was one that resulted in an inspiration for all people. For Helen Keller truly became a woman of inspiration. Yet this play does not stand on the laurels of Helen Keller. It is instead an intense drama that tells the story of a flailing invalid and an indomitable Irish girl and of the magic that resulted.

Director Frances Royster was extremely creative in her presentation. The minimum of aesthetic distance between audience and actors allowed Miss Royster to create a sharing that was almost frightening at times. The play was clearly directed intricately as indicated by the scene in which teacher and pupil fought violently for eight and a half minutes

(please notice--I timed it). This fight was directed in such a way as to imply open and immediate hostility. Yet the audience was ever aware of the innocent motivation behind the hostility, and we were forced to lend our compassion and to absorb this brutality. Surely much of this depends on the actor, but to provide the circumstances and intricate blocking necessary for this effect and to turn this intricacy into chaos is an art. This is only one of many examples of Miss Royster's fine direction.

The leading ladies for the production were Eileen O'Grady as Annie Sullivan and 10-year-old Marcy Grace Stewart as the six-year-old Helen Keller. Child performers are seldom called upon to be anything but cute. Miss Stewart did not contain herself to this maxim, however, for she presented a mature characterization of the blind girl. She set the audience ill at ease in that they shared James Keller's feeling of being embarrassed to see her moving about so helplessly. Her movements were unbalanced as if we questioned whether she were insane as well as blind and deaf. She maintained this posture until the very end, when she developed to the point of our acceptance. With her newfound knowledge, she became like a rose that goes back into the bud.

Eileen O'Grady in the role of Annie Sullivan was as sentimental and compromising as an army tank. As far from a compliment as that may sound, she slapped the audience with her characterization and brought us through the turbulence with an innate understanding of her trial and eventual tribulation. Her

Irish temperament justly showed through, for Annie was indomitable and impractical yet at times very warm and caring. It would be easy to portray Annie Sullivan as a pseudo-superhuman whom we know would win out in the end. O'Grady as Annie was not this superhuman, however, for she was very human with all the doubts, fears, and complexes. We must consider this to be one of Miss O'Grady's most sensitive characterizations.

Vance Mizelle proved that he is an even better actor on stage than he is in the classroom. This statement alone is tangible evidence that his performance on Wednesday night was laudable. All levity aside, Mr. Mizelle was commanding in his role of Captain Keller. He was an irascible Southern gentleman who was given to practicality most of the time and understanding only at intervals. He was able, however, to steer away from the stereotypicalization that one often sees in such a character. His role was a unique complement to the struggle between Annie and Helen and to the human relationship that was shared in the Keller household. In all, a fine performance.

Kate and James Keller as portrayed respectively by Jill Woodlief and Jay Stellmon were acted and directed well. Kate was very convincing. Her scream in the opening scene and the emotion which followed effectively steeled the au-

dience, forced us to discover the gravity of the situation, and immersed us into the uncomfortable circumstances. James was similarly convincing, though we were forced to wonder about the motivation behind some of James Keller's character developments. This, however, may well be the fault of the playwright rather than Mr. Stellmon.

The experience at the Tank Theater was indeed a pleasing one. The most pleasant note was the immediate rapport between audience and cast. The 85 seats at the Tank are arranged in three rows, the first of which is actually in the middle of the stage. The set was structurally simple yet technically intricate. Lighting by Richard Ward was excellent in that it manipulated our atten-

tion precisely on the small set. The Tank Theatre production of THE MIRACLE WORKER was a very Mature production for such a small amateur troupe. It showed originality in acting and in direction; we are made eager to see what is done with future production.

A major prerequisite for successful theatrical criticism is that the reviewer be able to find something to pan or to tear apart in relation to the show; this is to say that admiring reviewers don't sell newspapers. It is without apology however, that this reviewer acclaims the Tank production of THE MIRACLE WORKER as a dramatic experience that is simply not lacking in vitality and talent.

NOTICE

Election for the student-elected representative to the cafeteria Board of Directors will be held on February 19th. Vote and be heard. You have nothing to lose.

North's Reply

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Parental Permission Slips which state that the student may use her own discretion in signing out overnight. The Council is also objecting to the "checking-up" policy which will be enforced if there is "reason to doubt that the information on the Special Leave Card is invalid." BISHOP'S L.A.W. states that the integrity of Wesleyan students will not be questioned. The North Hall Dorm Council considers this a valuable aspect of respect for the individual.

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