

Hot I Baltimore: shabby, but a nice place to visit

The Duke Players' season-opening production of *The Hot I Baltimore* crackles and sparkles in an oddly satisfying sort of way. The play is long; some of the performances leave much to be desired; but the total effect is quite interesting, and, at times, exciting.

The play is set in the lobby of a seedy Baltimore hotel which, long before the "E" burned out on the neon sign outside, used to be "one of the most exclusive medium-sized hotels on the Eastern Seaboard." Now it's just a gathering place for prostitutes and outcasts, old people and misfits. The hot water doesn't work, the elevator has been broken for some time and on the day when playwright Lanford Wilson lets us watch the intersecting lives of the current set of lodgers, they have just been given one month's notice of eviction because the hotel is going to be razed.

The whole play depends on realism. One must fully accept the reality of the situation or the poetry of the playwright begins to look and sound foolish. Director H. Lee Fowlkes has paced the

show well and has drawn some truly fine performances from his cast, but he hasn't insisted on strict attention to detail, and when actors of the correct age could not be found, he was unable to effectively substitute the talent at hand.

The intimacy of Branson Theatre was appropriate for the show, but at such

theatre

by Rick Sebak

Hot I Baltimore, by Lanford Wilson
Directed by H. Lee Fowlkes and performed by the Duke Players

close quarters it is hard for me to believe it's a "recent Memorial Day" if last week's *Time* magazine is sitting on the coffee table. What may sound like nit-picking is really very important if one is to create the genuine world of the play. And the sorry attempt to pass off Robert Hunt as the aged Mr. Morse was

the show's weakest point. College students can get away with playing exaggerated old men in farces but not in realistic pieces. Similarly, Stephanie Weisband's hair did not need to be streaked with grey for her to play Mrs. Oxenham. She might have a chance to be believable if she weren't trying so hard to be a crotchety old woman.

But these flaws do not destroy the production.

Marge Williams plays the Girl, a 19-year-old call girl who hasn't decided what to call herself yet, and manages to effectively produce an alluring kind of believability. The Girl embodies the only real hope in the play, the only spirit which might be able to save America from its bleak and decadent present, and Ms. Williams' performance is marked with an apparent genuine conviction, an All-American kind of naive courage which works. Her approach makes a more real character of the Girl than I saw in a New York production in which the mysterious and eccentric qualities of the character were emphasized.

I thought Drew Beal was right as Bill Lewis, the night clerk. When he and the Girl had scenes together at the desk, I felt somehow privileged to eavesdrop on their lives.

Debbie Jung was spectacular as Suzy. Even in a hot pink, satin mini-skirt and gobs of make-up, she managed to be, above all else, warmly and believably human.

The part of Jamie, the slightly retarded brother of a brutish girl named Jackie, is a difficult one. His level of intelligence must be found and maintained. Jon Miller succeeds. Several of the play's finest moments are his: when he watches another character light a cigarette which he craves, when he starts to complete his sister's sentences and when he enters alone in the last act.

The most endearing of the collection



The night clerk (Drew Beal) makes his point with the call girl (Marge Williams) in the Duke Players' production of *Hot I Baltimore*

of characters in this production is probably April Green, the aging prostitute whose fowl mouth and outlook on life are refreshing in context. Sue Ronan slinks around in the role and apparently has a good time. I most appreciated the fact that April's age was not emphasized, and Ms. Ronan was able to find a suitable character without resorting to cheap make-up tricks.

The scene design by Scott Parker is simple and effective, but I wish he'd been a bit more careful with the Art Deco design on the desk—it looks sloppy and too big. Mary Davis' costumes are all appropriate (especially the Girl's outfit), but I question the too genuine elegance of April's dress in Act III.

The show runs again this weekend, and it's definitely worth the trip, especially if you've not yet been exposed to this play. The theatre's small and reservations might be recommended. Tickets and information can be obtained by calling 684-4059 or 684-3181.

'Mad Dog Blues' opens new company's season

A rock, comic-book opera, *The Mad Dog Blues*, opens at 8 p.m. Oct. 16 in the Graham Memorial Lounge Theatre.

The play is the first production of the Playmakers Repertory Company, and it features an assorted cast of characters: Mae West, Jesse James, Marlene Dietrich, Captain Kidd and Paul Bunyan.

In the play by American Sam Shepard, two holdouts from the '60s—Kosmo and Yahoooi—travel through American mythology and the Hollywood subculture in search of pirate gold.

In between, there are sharks, peasants, booty, a Ghost Girl and Babe the Blue Ox. The play has been described by off-Broadway director Michael McClure as "tender as a kitten's purr by a fireplace in a rainstorm."

The play will run for three consecutive weekends: Oct. 16-19, Oct. 23-26 and Oct. 30-Nov. 2. Tickets at \$2.50 each are on sale at the Graham Memorial box office or Ledbetter-Pickard on Franklin Street.

The new company's next play will be *Isadora Duncan Sleeps with the Russian Navy* by Jeff Wanshal. It will run Nov. 6-9, 13-16 and 20-23.

The company's artistic director Tom Haas said he hopes the company will become a contemporary voice in American theater.

It also plans to present Eugene O'Neill's *The Great God Brown* in February and the Paul Green and Kurt Weill musical, *Johnny Johnson* in March.

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Crossword Puzzler

Answer to Yesterday's Puzzle

ACROSS

- Strain for breath
- Soak up
- God of love
- Region
- Sign of zodiac
- U.S. Attorney General
- Not completely
- Decorous
- Choice part
- Unlocks
- Affirmative votes
- Mental image
- Lubricate
- Writing tablet
- Young boy
- Negative
- Mountain on Crete
- A state (abbr.)
- Goal
- Bog down
- Timid
- Goddess of discord
- Period of time
- More rational
- Leaks through
- Figures of speech
- Brook
- Poker stake
- Vessel
- Unemployed
- Irishman
- One, no matter which
- Actual being

DOWN

- Stare open-mouthed
- Sea in Asia
- Continued story
- Girl's nickname
- Crafty
- Faroe Islands
- whirlwind
- Parent (colloq.)
- Run away to be married
- Amend
- Part of stove
- Title of respect (pl.)
- Drugs
- Was borne
- Narrow openings
- Country of Europe
- Number
- Electrified particle
- Girl's name
- Time gone by
- Period of time
- Signify
- Father
- For fear that
- Beliefs
- Reputae
- Eagle's nest
- Antlered animal
- Wild buffalo of India
- Cronies (colloq.)
- Pintail duck
- Resort
- Pigpen
- Preposition

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