

Kipawo Showboat Company

Poor tasteless production of fantasticks

by Cheryl Downton

The essence of the play, **The Fantasticks**, is contained in the lyrics of the 'theme' song, "Try to Remember". Unfortunately, in the **Kipawo Showboat Company's** production, there were too many things that need to be forgotten. Admittedly, some of the problems can be traced to the source, the play itself. **The Fantasticks** has enjoyed a long stint on Broadway, but it seems to be outliving its usefulness. One of the musical numbers, in particular, is blatantly crass and unethical. There are other faults with the play, and the **Kipawo Showboat Company** production seemed determined to promote them all.

The players consist of a boy, a girl, their fathers, a mute of questionable origin, two character actors, and a narrator who becomes a participant in the action. The stronger performances came from the 'minor' characters, in a manoeuvre destined to emphasize the weaknesses of the central players. The boy, played by Kerry Dorey, did not portray the character handed him by the playwright. Although he did have a few bright moments, the majority of his performance was dulled by poor projection, pitch problems, and a generally unenthusiastic effort. His ploddings were too methodical and lifeless, and the scenes that really failed to give even a glimpse of the playwright's intent suffered to the point of ridicule. His cries for help while being flogged by the experiences of life held a definite similarity to the forlorn cries of Fozzie Bear of Muppet Show fame. (Listen to the Muppet Show Album No. 2, last side after the closing theme song, for confirmation.)

The girl, played by Carolyn Munro, was another disappointment. While she didn't seem to have as many problems with the musical aspect of her characterization, her portrayal invited as much emotional response as a soggy paper towel. There was no life, no enthusiasm for the part she was undertaking. She just did not come across as the tender-hearted, but strong-willed girl of sixteen, awaiting the discovery of the marvels of love.

The fathers of the two, while undertaking more of a supportive role, combined to create two of the more believable characterizations. They worked well together, and held some of the more fragile elements of the play from falling into painful oblivion. Bob Martyn and Neal Benneworth gave energetic performances, and acted as good foils, one for the other.

The mute, a part reminiscent of 'the wall' in the Shakespearean comedy, **Pyramus and Thisbe**, is played by Allen Hume. Although he did not get the maximum usage from his character, he did

manage to present a reasonable portrayal. The two actors, played by veteran Jack Sheriff and Jim Murphy, gave the audience the few chuckles provided in the performance. Both gave accomplished displays of the fine art of death upon a stage.

Stephen Abbass, one of the **Kipawo Showboat Company's** most versatile players, did a fine job in his offering of El

Gallo, the somewhat mystifying gentleman of Spanish descent. Not only did he look and sound the part of the conniving arranger, his characterization was the most stable. The audience could easily believe that he was who he proclaimed.

The play, itself, is dated: any theatrical production that includes a song entitled "Rape", which expounds on

the merits of such an act, and includes such choice phrases in its lyrics as, 'such a pretty rape', 'rape by night is best', 'a rape with Indians, a truly charming sight', 'the kind of rape depends on what you pay', 'nothing cheap', 'it takes a dozen men at least', 'sounds expensive', 'it's very grand', 'that's kind of pretty', and 'the sort of rape you'll never forget' lends itself to shocked disgust. Rape is not something

to joke about, at least not by those who consider themselves thinking and feeling human beings.

The choice of material and actors left much to be desired; it is hoped that the next **Kipawo Showboat Company** productions will not fall victim to similar lack of insight.

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