

Excellent Setting For Finely-Acted Murder Mystery

By MRS. JOHN H. WARNER

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The Greek Theatre at Cranbrook is now the scene of a play which has been specially conceived for its unique setting. Jerry McMechan, well-known locally as an actor and director, has written an ingenious play-within-a-play for St. Dumast's Guild.

The intimate collaboration of author, setting and cast has resulted in a novel and exciting theatrical experience for all who see "A Midsummer Night's Murder."

At night, the Greek Theatre is an ideal place to stage a murder play. It lends itself not only to colorful pageantry and dance, but to the sinister actions of characters involved in crime.

The stage lights enhance the effect. Although they cheerfully brighten the grassy orchestra, the elevated stage, the arches and balustrades, and the scene-houses on each side, they nevertheless make the encroaching darkness more mysterious and opaque.

A FOOL is seen through the arches and beyond that, dimly lit another Greekian outbuilding—all in a spooly perspective. With their under-lights lit, even the natural beauties—trees and shrubs—give the impression that they are not so readily hidden in their depths.

Every aspect of this setting has been thought out by McMechan in his ready-rudr. In an interesting fore-shortening of the relationship between the murderer and the victim, he has placed some of his characters in the audience.

At times members of the cast call upon the audience directly for help and sympathy. For the playgoers, some of the conventional barriers are therefore violated, but the result is, for our time and place, a refreshing one.

THE EVENING begins innocently with the program announced by the president of the Tuesday Drama and Culture Club, Mrs. Emily Winston Carp.

If Mrs. Carp seems fluttering and hept, it is only because the ensuing performance of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" promises to be the most horrendous interpretation of Shakespeare ever imprinted on an audience—real or imaginary.

As the assorted Grecian types walk up the opening scene with wooden gestures and glassy-eyed intensity, the fragile thread of fancy is broken by a piercing scream.

What happens then on is, "Stage Manager Maud Purdy asserts in Act III, 'a darn sight better than Shakespeare.'" By a theatrical sleight of hand, one of the actors has been murdered right on stage.

FROM THEN ON it is the business of the play to spot the killer, and since the victim is an unsavory character, everybody in the Shakespearean play has a substantial motive.

Sheriff Peasely Benson's declaration that "a lot of unpleasant things are going to be said, because an unpleasant person was killed here tonight," is a statement that loses some of its menace as the interrogation progresses, for all of the misdeeds associated with amateur dramatics befall the group: child-actors raise undisciplined havoc and get sick in dressing-rooms; lights go off unexpectedly; someone declares that she could use "a good stiff drink."

The inevitable call for the police is delayed because the actor sent on this mission didn't have a dime with him.

A TOP shows up only to report a parking violation, and when the police finally appear in force, the crooner puts the final stamp of authority on the knife-jabbed corpse by pronouncing it "dead, all right."

The untangling of the web of blackmail and bribery behind each alibi is a feat that the sheriff hopes to ask to his advantage at election time.

IN SPITE OF the maddening delays and petty climaxes, the night-dresses finally unpreheated in an exciting and unexpected burst of sub-plot. Toward this end McMechan has woven an artful but plausible plot, and the performances of the actors have served him well.

Betty Brewster as Mrs. Carp plays a club lady hard to resist—except but fluttering—now happily, now determinedly poised. Her self-rebuke, (delivered in a trembling mezz-voice) to "Keep calm," and her jittery disobedience of this sensible injunction, are a delight to watch.

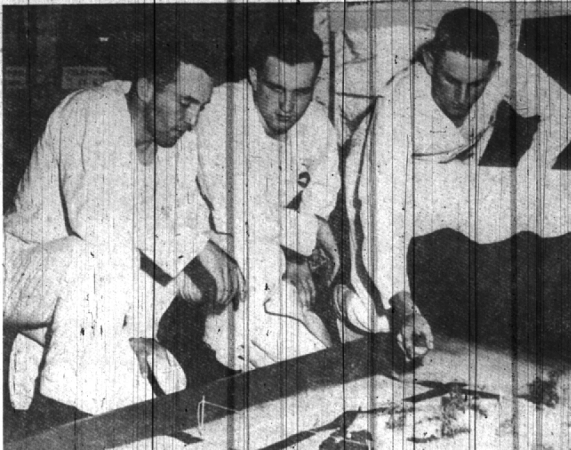
Her nervous spurts of laughter and sobriety are amusingly contrasted by the grimacing Stage Manager, Maud Purdy. This part is played by Fannie Lee with dour and stowing intensity, and a true comic touch.

AS SHERIFF BENSON, Paul Averil ambles energetically through the proceedings with the typical nonchalance of a bored policeman until he discovers a method of solution.

Phillie Harris gives a brittle and pungent interpretation of a restless matron, and Bill Crawford and Jack Sanders are the bland types that remind us of successful men in small communities.

Members of the "stage crew" are convincingly harassed—wigs, hair are unmoored, smocks, rumped, and tennis shoes are worn for greater efficiency. (But let us not forget the willed corsages, presented by a grateful cast, worn throughout the evening.)

Micky Gieg, Betty Booth, Gordon Saunders, Jr., Cindy Ransdell and Ed Andress, as members of the Shakespearean cast, provide



TRAINING IN JOINT AMPHIBIOUS WARFARE BY West Point Cadets and Midshipmen from Annapolis at the U.S. Naval Amphibious Base, Little Creek, Va. are 1300 second class juniors, joined by a Canadian Naval Cadet unit. Shown examining a model mock-up beachhead established by the Joint Amphibious forces are, left to right, James R. Snow, Crothersville, Ind., George W. Conner, Ada, Ohio, and Delbert V. Keener, son of Mr. and Mrs. Vernon S. Keener, 1196 Holland, (U. S. Navy Photo)

Summer Cruise For Midshipmen

The U. S. Naval Academy Class of 1955 is scheduled to participate in a varied summer training program. Among the Midshipmen Second Class are Delbert V. Keener, son of Mr. and Mrs. Vernon S. Keener, 1196 Holland, and John W. Roberts, son of Mr. and Mrs. John C. Roberts of 450 Yarnouth rd.

The summer training will embrace amphibious and aviation indoctrination, including a three-week aircraft carrier cruise to Halifax, Nova Scotia and educational tours of Naval installations and private industries in the Philadelphia area.

Art Scholarships Given To Three Academy Students

Scholarships worth \$1,500 each have been awarded three young artists by Cranbrook Academy of Art after a world-wide competition. Zoltan Szepesy, director of the Academy, has announced.

Gus Baker, Atlanta painter and print maker, will receive the Ellen S. Booth Scholarship, formerly held by Paul E. Evans, Jr., musician of Philadelphia. Baker has studied in Tennessee, Georgia, and at the Art Institute of Chicago, and has held scholarships at the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts.

The Elja Sagrinen Scholarship will go to architect Christer Barlund of Helsinki, Finland, succeeding Are Vasterlid of Oslo, Norway. Barlund has been an outstanding student of the Finland Institute of Technology, and recently won the Finnish Architect Society prize for design of a church.

SCULPTOR PAUL T. Graulund of Minneapolis will receive the George G. Booth Scholarship, which was held during the past year by Gabriel Kohn, who will teach sculpture at the Cranbrook summer session before returning to his home in France. Graulund, who has attended Gustavus Adolphus College

The awards, which will cover fees and maintenance during a year of advanced study at Cranbrook Academy of Art, are in memory of Ellen S. Booth, first head of the Academy, and of George G. and Ellen S. Booth, donors of the six cultural institutions at Cranbrook.

Five Commissioned At Michigan State

Five area men were commissioned as second lieutenants of the United States Army in a commissioning parade held at Michigan State College during graduation week.

They were James L. Maloney, route three, Astorford corps; David M. Maylen, 1060 Humphrey, Artillery corps; Betram S. Lowenstein, Franklin, Quartermaster corps; James R. MacFarney, 24303 Somerset, Beverly Hills, Armored corps; and Lee C. Hanson, 5545 Putnam, Infantry corps.

The 293 cadets who received their second lieutenant commissions were the last to graduate from Michigan State under the old system of optional branch choice.



PAUL J. AYRES, son of Mr. and Mrs. Julius Ayres, 890 Emmons, is completing his AF basic Airman indoctrination course at Lackland Air Force Base, San Antonio, Tex. His basic training is preparing him for entrance into Air Force technical training and for assignment in specialized work.

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