

Style helps and harms play

Readers theatre production presents strong performances but runs dry at times

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During a time when watching a film with the highest quality special effects on the most recently updated technology is prevalent, sometimes it takes a simple story told in a simple manner to remind audiences that bigger is not always better and newer is not always necessary.

Gathering around the radio with the family to listen to a broadcast is not common nowadays, but audiences can experience the next best thing with Curtain Call Theatre Company's current production of "Christmas on the Radio: It's A Wonderful Life," which opens tonight.

"It's A Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play," the play's original title, was written by Joe Landry and was first performed in 1996, five decades after the play's inspiration, the well-known film "It's A Wonderful Life" starring James Stewart, was released. Audiences view the production from the perspective of a live studio audience watching the recording of a radio station broadcast.

With scripts in hand and no prevalent visual action, actors played multiple characters and were responsible for many of the sound effects, helping to create the experience of watching the production of a 1940s radio broadcast production.

Like the film, the play tells the story of George Bailey, a troubled man who wants to end his life. Just as George prepares to kill himself, Clarence, a guardian angel, steps in and reveals the impact George has had on the lives of others by showing him what his hometown, Bedford Falls, would be like if he had never been born.

This production might be a new experience for many audience members, positive for some and negative for others. Performed in a "readers theatre" style in which there is no blocking and actors use scripts, this production lives and breathes off the cast members' verbal acting abilities, something that seemed to help and harm the production depending on the scene, the actor

and the character.

Being "over-the-top," which occurs occasionally, typically is frowned upon, but it seems to fit because over-the-top is almost necessary with radio broadcasts to help listeners differentiate between characters.

A majority of the cast played several roles, making characterization and differentiation essential. For the most part, the cast accepted the challenge and passed with flying colors, making clever use of accents and vocal tone quality.

While the cast as a whole performed well, a few stood out among the rest and presented strong performances. Finding a role's perfect casting match is a rare and highly sought-after experience of which directors dream. In several cases, this production must have been director Mark Willis' dream come true because many roles could not have been cast better.

Playing the announcer, Steve Eklof was perhaps the most perfectly casted actor because his voice and personality could not have been more appropriate for the role, no doubt thanks to the fact that he is the a radio announcer for 1450 KIRX in real life.

Fans of Stewart's performance in the original film are in for a treat because John Taylor presents a hauntingly similar performance in the role of George Bailey primarily due to how closely Taylor's voice matches Stewart's. With Taylor working alongside Sara Chamberlain as Mary Bailey, the pair presented depth and sincerity unparalleled by most of the cast.

Also presenting an impressive degree of depth and characterization were Ashley Young, whose primary role was Clarence, the guardian angel, and Cy Allemang, whose primary role was Mr. Potter. Both added humor, along with LaRoyce Allemang, and charm to the production and provided strong characterization and contrast among different characters they played.

Because the show is a radio play, technical aspects were minimal. The sound design was well-executed and creatively put together for the most part, despite technical difficulties during the first act of the dress rehearsal.

From the clanking of bottles to help set the bar scene to the thudding of shoes on a table to make the sound of an individual walking, sound clips and



Jessie Poole/Index

Sara Chamberlain playing Mary Bailey, left, and John Taylor playing George Bailey, right, read their lines from scripts during "It's A Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play." Lack of action and occasional lack of sincerity caused moments to be dry.

sound effects, which primarily were produced by actors, worked well with the production and made it seem more like a radio broadcast.

While this production is not for everyone and proved dry at times, "It's A Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play" is bound to hit home with anyone who likes to hear a good story.

The production has its fair share of weaknesses, but serves as a pleasant way to get into the Christmas spirit and hear a classic story in a new way.

Review based off dress rehearsal Dec. 6.

PERFORMANCES ARE 7 P.M.
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AND 2 P.M. SUNDAY

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Have your voice heard

BY BLAISE HART-SCHMIDT
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At the end of every semester, several University emails pop up in my inbox. I usually save them for later when I have more time. To many, they aren't that important, and probably ignored. But I take my time and proceed thoughtfully: The emails are for professor evaluations.

These evaluations give students the chance to voice their opinions about professors.

If your chemistry teacher was exceptionally understanding when you had some personal issues and needed an extension, write about it. If your history professor never gave appropriate or timely feedback on your essays, include that in the survey. And if your health teacher was just mediocre, consider that too.

I've written some scathing reviews about professors before because — surprise, surprise — I want my voice heard. Both department heads and professors read these responses, and now is the time I can give my opinion anonymously. How else is a department chair supposed to know a professor is wasting students' time if students don't let him or her know?

Similarly, praise the professors who do a great job. You know the old adage that says if you complain about bad service at a restaurant, you should compliment the good service too? Think of these evaluations like that. Yes, administrators need to know when professors

aren't doing a good job, but they also should know when instructors are going above and beyond. It's wishful thinking, but maybe your shining review will put that favorite instructor on the road to a raise or one step further in his or her tenure-track.

The older, and more into debt, I get, the more I care about my education, and where exactly my tuition goes. Students pay enough money that it's understandable to expect superb professors. If I think a professor isn't giving me what I'm paying

for, I want to make sure someone hears about it, so the instructor can change and future students can benefit. It can be difficult to be so critical of professors, especially because our grades are in their hands, but remember that these are anonymous,

and professors don't receive them until after grades have been turned in.

Think of it like voting. Just like it's the duty of citizens to select their leaders, it's our duty as students to accurately evaluate professors. And just like voting, if we don't authentically participate in these reviews, we have no room to complain next semester when we're stuck with the same boring professor.

Exam week can be tough, but maybe you can view these reviews as a study break, a time to pat an awesome professor on the back, or to express your negative opinions about that certain professor.

Whether we're satisfied with our instructors or not, as the semester draws to an end, let's remember that famous P. Diddy voting slogan: evaluate or die.



Dark comedy offers twisted holiday story

BY KEN DUSOLD
Assistant Editor

"Some people take and some people get took — and they know they're getting took, but there's nothing they can do about it."

This profoundly pessimistic worldview poised by Fran Kubelik, played by Shirley MacLaine from the film "The Apartment," who knows the feeling of loneliness during the holidays all too well, sums up the two types of characters legendary director Billy Wilder presents in his biting 1960 satire, "The Apartment." The film — which won five Academy Awards, including Best Picture — is about humanity (exhibited by those being "took") and the lack thereof (exhibited by those doing the taking) in 1960 New York.

Set in the dark days of December, "The Apartment" takes a revealing look at the life of C.C. Baxter (Jack Lemmon), a single, corporate pencil-pusher with the dream of someday finding himself in an executive office, a wife and some control of his life. As it is, Baxter is more like his pencil than a person, being ordered to accomplish menial tasks and made to do favors that ultimately will benefit his superiors. One such favor includes the frequent use of his humble flat by several of his married bosses and their mistresses. In exchange for Baxter's "good work," the bosses recommend him to his higher-ups.

One such higher-up is J.D. Shelldrake, played by a charm-

ing, but slick Fred MacMurray. Shelldrake is a married father of two and chief executive of the insurance company for which Baxter works. Following a stern lecture he gives to Baxter about morals and company policy, Shelldrake jumps at the chance to borrow his subordinate's abode twice a week as he usually is unable to find somewhere "suitable" to carry on his own affair. Of course, Baxter is rewarded handsomely for his "generosity."

Quickly moving up in the company thanks to his apartment, Baxter muscles up the courage to ask out his crush, the company elevator girl Kubelik (an adorably vulnerable MacLaine). Unfortunately for the film's budding lothario, Kubelik is otherwise occupied with a married man — one of the same men to whom Baxter lends his apartment. Unbeknownst to Baxter and Kubelik until it's almost too late, the audience watches as both are played for fools — trapped in a system unwilling to offer them their greatest dreams without the loss of their most basic goodness.

This is an unusual holiday comedy because the content — which includes adultery, suicide, alcoholism and depression — is incredibly serious. Wilder highlights the light humor found in the irony blanketing the story and its characters.

Baxter's neighbors, Dr. and Mrs. Dreyfuss (Jack Kruschen and Naomi Stevens), constantly berate him for the loud noises and continuous debauchery they can hear

going on in his apartment, unaware that Baxter spends most of nights waiting outside the building for his "guests" to finish their visit. The rolodexes on Baxter's desk are used more often for setting the week's schedule with his bosses than communicating with other departments. And while his despicable bosses toast their girlfriends with bottles of champagne, cheese and crackers, Baxter strains his spaghetti noodles through an old tennis-racket. During it all, the audience always knows more than any of the characters.

Lemmon represented the "everyman" on screen throughout his 52-year acting career. Thus, there is little surprise that his portrayal of Baxter evokes both heart-wrenching despair — as when he learns of Kubelik's affair — and childlike glee — as seen when Kubelik agrees to maybe meet him at a showing of "The Music Man." A viewer might come close to shedding a tear for Baxter when he describes his usual Christmas tradition of being alone and feel utter jubilation for him when he finally tells his bosses "no."

Supporting Lemmon is a stellar cast, terrific writing and an impeccable achievement in filmmaking. Wilder captures the solitude in Baxter's and Kubelik's lives through the use of open spaces sparsely filled with a piece of furniture here and a plant there. Juxtapose Baxter's cramped apartment with that of Shelldrake's Westchester County mansion in a scene in which the two men speak on the phone, and audiences see two men turning their backs on what they have for something found in the other's life. Being a comedy, Baxter must figure out how to snap out of this misguided reverie.

"Be a mensch," says Dr. Dreyfuss to the half-confused, half-irritated Baxter. "It means be a human being!"

For Baxter, therein lies salvation. For Wilder and the audience, it's where the humor rests.

