

# The Fantasticks

Review by Deborah McGee

Continued from cover

The problem is that the word "rape" has two meanings. One is to force a person to have sexual intercourse. The other is "to carry off by force." There is nothing in *The Fantasticks* nor its current production to suggest anything remotely criminal or callous. An open-minded reading of the offending musical number's words and of the related section of the script, especially given the context of the play as a whole, would show that author Tom Jones intended the second meaning of the word. And that in a playful, metaphorical, never brutal way.

*The Fantasticks* tells a sweet, simple story. Two people fall in love, then find their romance wearing thin with the light of day. They split up and explore the world on their own, becoming more mature as a result, then they find each other again. The musical's numbers are exceptionally memorable, most notably *Soon It's Gonna Rain*, *Try to Remember* and *I Can See It*. No wonder Tom Jones's lyrics and Harvey Schmidt's music have endured.

As *The Girl*, Montra French-Dickey was not up to par. Her talent was sparkingly apparent recently in Mainstage's *Starting Here, Starting Now*. Saturday night, though, every time it came around for her to really shine, I could barely hear her. Was it an acoustical problem? Well, I'll put up with a little of that to have the pleasure of being outdoors on a warm summer evening, cooling off with a guava Hawaiian ice, breathing hot-to-warm-to-cool breezes as the evening progressed.

Or maybe, just maybe, French-Dickey's mediocre performance was caused by the political ferment, which made her appear a rape victim, rather than just an archetypal young woman. Whatever the reason, I hope her con-

siderable talent beams forth again as the play rolls on.

Kevin Boling had the most complex and interesting role as El Gallo, the play's narrator and the man who teaches *The Girl* some of life's truths. His make-up was particularly effective and his red/black costume perfectly swash-buckling, in a portrayal slightly tinged a la TV's *Magnum, P.I.* A cynically loving older man more worldly wise, he stayed in role even when the spotlight literally or figuratively was not upon him.

James Aday and Denny Guehler nearly stole the show as obviously veteran performers. As *The Actor*, Aday delivered his garbled Shakespearean lines with great aplomb; Mrs. Malaprop would have applauded. His dirty tights, so tacky they were even crudely mended on the right knee, appropriately bottomed off his Renaissance noble-gone-tumbling duds. Guehler amused us in a role many actors would kill for: *The Man Who Dies* (Mortimer).

Charles Crowley showed marvelous range of voice as *The Boy*. He changed believably from a charming, yet overly narcissistic poet, into a young man of relative maturity. His bruised cheek was effective as an understated reminder of *The Boy's* shattered delusions; his voice carried well and was a joy to hear.

One unusual feature of this production is director Bob Webb's choice of two women to play roles traditionally filled by men—that of the children's parents. Nancy Hopps and Nancy Whitacre seemed to enjoy their roles; their costumes are zany androgenous, and their duets definitely reflect our community's interest in styles vaudevillian. Excellent their sense of timing, and perfect the retrieval of a forgotten scarf Saturday night. These two role should grow

as the production matures.

Synnové Abrahamsen added exotic beauty to many scenes as *The Mute*. She handled most of the play's props, which are few in number, and always did so with grace and good timing. I loved the play's creative way of making rain and snow. The Mute held a silver standard over the heads of the young lovers: for rain, it sparkled like elongated Christmas tree icicles; for snow, skinny strands of opaque white shimmered from the same instrument.

What looks like a rather flatly colored rainbow—when one checks out the downtown mall stage in daylight strolls—came alive with production. Lighting intensifies the colorfulness of the freeform mural/floor painting. Sherie Blankenship provided able choreography, most notably in the mock fencing scenes. Johnathan Mansfield's musical direction and his piano touches were professional; Jeannie Manela added musical depth with her graceful harp accompaniment.

Last June, *The Fantasticks* closed its 26th straight year of delighting New York City audiences, a record run in theater history. In 1986, boys and girls still lose their innocence, parents still fret and people still fall in love with each other, which explains the timeless nature of this fine play. Its message, if there is one, is in praise of the romantic spirit.

POSTSCRIPT: The cast and crew of the local staging of *The Fantasticks* deserve this year's grace-under-pressure award.

## 3-Week Issue

The Aug. 28 issue of *What's Happening* will cover 3 weeks of events, Aug. 28-Sept. 17. Calendar and classified deadline is Thursday, Aug. 21 at 4 pm.

## CINEMA

## now showing

**Allens:** Warrant Officer Ripley, who alone survived *Alien*, finds her reputation in critical condition. A second encounter with terror may yet clear her name. Stars Sigourney Weaver. Cinema World (342-6536).

**April Fool's Day:** College students seem to vanish, one by one, from a remote island. Shows with *Friday the 13th—Part VI*. West 11th (342-4142).

**Back to School:** Rodney Dangerfield provides the fun as a rich businessman who goes to college. Shows with *Big Trouble in Little China*. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

**Big Trouble in Little China:** Described as an "action adventure/comedy/kung fu/ghost story," including a great Chinese warrior, sewer monsters, and the Room of Upside-Down Hell. Showing with *Back to School*. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

**Club Paradise:** Comedy. A Chicago fireman takes early retirement and heads for the sunny Caribbean, where he gets mixed up in the island's revolution. Stars Robin Williams, Peter Onorato, Twigg, and Mr. Jimmy Cliff. Shows with *Short Circuit* at Oakway (342-5351).

**Ferris Bueller's Day Off:** A rich kid has some serious fun when he's not in school. New comedy by John Hughes (*Pretty in Pink*). Valley River Twin (686-8633).

**A Fine Mess:** Based on the old Laurel and Hardy flick, *The Music Box*. Two regular guys get involved with an unsavory bunch of horse race fixers. Stars Ted Danson (TV's *Cheers*) and Howie Mandel (*St. Elsewhere*). Springfield Quad (726-9073).

**Flight of the Navigator:** A 12-year-old boy becomes navigator of a super-advanced spaceship. Adventure from Disney Studios. West 11th (342-4142) and Springfield Quad (726-9073).

**Friday the 13th—Part VI:** Or, the plot that wouldn't die. More of the same. More to come. Shows with *April Fool's Day*. West 11th (342-4142).

**Hannah and Her Sisters:** Woody Allen's latest romantic comedy, considered by some critics to be his best. Stars Mia Farrow, Barbara Hershey, Michael Caine, and Max von Sydow. Late show at the Bijou (686-2458).

**Heartburn:** Romantic comedy turned sour. A magazine writer revels in marriage and mother-

hood, while her columnist husband gets his satisfaction on the side. Stars Meryl Streep and Jack Nicholson. Valley River Twin (686-8633).

**Howard the Duck:** The earthly adventures of a cynical duck from another planet. And it's not animated. Co-stars human Lea Thompson (*Back to the Future*). McDonald (344-4343).

**The Karate Kid: Part II:** Ralph Macchio and Pat Morita together again. This time the Kid joins his teacher in Japan to help him resolve an unfinished conflict. National (344-3431).

**Labyrinth:** Goblins, ogres, fairies and David Bowie try to keep a young woman in a magical maze. Sounds like Halloween in Hollywood. Shows with *Legend* at Fine Arts (747-2201).

**Legal Eagles:** Attorneys choose up sides in this suspense/comedy, starting with an art fraud case, and heading toward murder. Stars Robert Redford, Debra Winger, and Daryl Hannah. Directed by Ivan Reitman (*Ghostbusters*). Springfield Quad (726-9073).

**Legend:** Good and evil go at each other again in this fantasy, starring Tom Cruise (*Risky Business*) in a change-of-pace role as Jack O' The Green, a forest hermit. Shows with *Labyrinth* at Fine Arts (747-2201).

**19th International Tournee of Animation:** Eighteen imaginative and unique animated works from around the world. Cinema 7 (687-0733).

**Nothing in Common:** Dramatic comedy. A successful, though immature, ad man takes on unexpected responsibilities as a result of his parents' divorce. Stars Tom Hanks (*Splash*), Jackie Gleason and Eva Marie Saint. Cinema World (342-6536).

**One Crazy Summer:** New comedy with Demi Moore (*About Last Night...*). Opens this week at Cinema World (342-6536).

**Ruthless People:** Comedy. When an obnoxious wife is kidnapped, her wealthy hubby refuses to pay her ransom. Stars Bette Midler and Danny DeVito. Cinema World (342-6536).

**Short Circuit:** Comedy/adventure. Ally Sheedy and Steve Guttenberg encounter a robot with human foibles. Shows with *Club Paradise* at Oakway (342-5351).

**Top Gun:** Tom Cruise (*Legend*) trains to be a hot-shot fighter pilot when he's not relaxing with Kelly McGillis (*Witness*). West 11th (342-4142).

**Transformers:** Animated stuff, for those who like films about expensive plastic toys. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

**When Father Was Away on Business:** A six-year-old boy's perspective of home events during his father's "resocialization" elsewhere in Stalinist Yugoslavia. This episodic tale took first prize at the 1985 Cannes Film Festival. Bijou (686-2458).

—A Fine Michael Sussman

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Filmed in a highly visual style, richly illuminated and designed, *FATHER* captures a zestful Slavic flavor. The Yugoslavian cast is memorable. All of the characters, especially the bright, manipulative children, are very likable. Throughout, there is a sense of warm intimacy and sophisticated humor. Don't Miss It!!

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