



Performing, on stage

'Fare' a tale of surrealism

After drinking a cup of poison, Socrates mused thoughtfully on the possibilities of his imminent journey into the unknown.

Centuries later, playwright Dennis Smith uses the characters in his "Excursion Fare" to explore that same element of mystery that surrounds death.

In "Excursion Fare," which is now playing on campus, Smith's unusual characters all hold tickets to a train ride into the unknown. The train seems to be headed for the same mysterious and terrifying destination that Socrates faced, and its passengers' unknown destinations — which symbolize heaven and hell — are determined by the fashion of their lives.

In the surrealistic, time-bending atmosphere of a chilly train depot, 10 weary travelers are made to unburden the crosses of guilt they all carry. As the story unfolds, they must account to each other for their presence in the station and eventually explain why they choose not to board the train.

Because of the play's overwhelmingly successful world premiere last April in the University's Arena Theatre, it has been revived this year in the expanded 400-seat Robinson Theatre. With a new cast and director (Peter Davis), "Excursion Fare" again reaches the heights of "experimental theater" and soon will be entered in the 1985 American College Theater Festival competition.

The band of travelers is a curious one, including historical figures such as Amelia Earhart, Michael Rockefeller, Jimmy Hoffa and 19th century writer Ambrose Bierce. They meet face-to-face with the fictional characters who fill out the cast; such as Bookman, an argyle-and-tennis-shoes professor who can't figure out how and why he has arrived at the depot.

Added to the bunch is a pathetic whiner named Lily who never had an ambition in her life, as well as a dusty old prospector by the name of Stubbs. Finishing off the cast is Henry, the bespectacled depot-master who controls both the ticket cage and the volatile emotions of his customers.

Action is often presented through dialogues between character couples. Michael Rockefeller (Scott Crisp) and Amelia Earhart (Kimberly Anderson) snuggle amorously in each others' arms, and Lily and Bookman (Debra Dreiling and Adam Ward) gradually take a special interest in each other.

The most compelling and hilarious duo by far is the Laurel-and-Hardy team of Tammany Hall Judge Joe Crater and his bitterly cynical counterpart, Ambrose Bierce. From games of cards and croquet to venomous verbal assaults, these two characters (portrayed by Mikel MacDonald and Joel Morello) masterfully execute

some of the most uproarious and touching scenes of the play. MacDonald gives the whimsical judge an especially animated personae with his outrageous gestures and facial expressions.

In the role of Stubbs, who has a yarn for every event in his life, Robert Foster gives a lighthearted performance as a rough ridin' cowboy with a heart full of "blind faith and raw courage." As one of the few characters to finally board the train, he rides off into the sunset like the Lone Ranger with an "Adios!"

One of the play's most dramatic events is the thunderous arrival and departure of the unseen train behind the depot. This special effect, engineered by Marty Schwarzbauer, creates an eerie 20 seconds of seat-shaking rumbling, evoking as much tension in the audience as is apparent in the strained faces of the players onstage.

The humor in "Excursion Fare" combines very contemporary, tongue-in-cheek quips with classic comedy styles and delivers almost non-stop joking throughout both acts. Not a pun went unrewarded by laughter at Friday night's performance, and one of Bierce's most scathing attacks on Lily brought a reaction of shocked "oohs" from the audience.

This play is the magnum opus of Dennis Smith, who worked for ten years in Los Angeles as a screenwriter/actor and three years with the Oregon Shakespearean Festival. He began writing "Excursion Fare" in 1980 and rewrote it four times before its premiere last April.

In the last six months, the play has undergone even more changes in the script, the directing and the casting, as well as structural changes in the stage equipment. With all these alterations, University Theater business manager and promotional coordinator Shelby Ferguson says that "the play itself is the same," however. Its success not only benefits those involved in it, she adds, but promotes the University's reputation of excellence in the field of theater.

As for the future of Smith's unique work, "Excursion Fare" is to be entered in the 1985 American College Theater Festival, a competition in which colleges and universities throughout the United States may enter new plays. The winners of the regional conferences will be taken to Washington, D.C., next spring where the play voted as the best in the nation will go onstage at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

"Excursion Fare" continues to play Thursday through Saturday. Tickets are \$5 for the general public, \$4 for senior citizens and students, and \$3.25 for University students. Tickets can be reserved by calling the University Theatre Box Office at 686-4191.

By Lori Stephens

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The two fraternity representatives will be in the EMU main lobby Tuesday, October 23rd and Wednesday, October 24th from 1:00pm to 5:00pm. They will be there to answer any questions and to provide information about Alpha Tau Omega. For further information contact Jeff Corah at 686-3701 or Craig Peterson at 686-5170.

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