

'The Curious Savage:' lightheaded and witty

by KAYE BARTON BAKKE
For The Post

A play set in a mental institution invites bad puns. Such as, "It's not all it's cracked up to be."
But when such wisecracks were heard during intermission at Saturday's performance of the Sandy Community Players' "The Curious Savage," they were offered by punsters and not armchair drama critics — and they were met with the groans reserved for bad jokes.
Under Jim Wilhite's direction, the three-year-old theater group achieved the lightheaded, compassionate interpretation playwright John Patrick intended for his comedy set in an East Coast mental institution called "The Cloisters."
The cast's treatment of the topic was reassuring to those who approached the play warily, thinking that a humorous theatrical treatment of mental illness has the potential for disaster.
But good taste prevailed throughout the production. There was laughter aplenty, but it was seldom demeaning to the inmates, or "guests" as they were called. Only one of the six guests — the hostile Mrs. Paddy — appeared demented, and Jan Bollerman played the role sympathetically, displaying an unyielding bad temper, and netting some of the heartiest laughter throughout the evening.
The plot revolves around a fortune, inherited by the almost-elderly Ethel Savage, played by Hannah Dalziel. Savage's whimsical plans for her millions are considered less than orthodox by her adult stepchildren (Mike Bailor, Bill Lawson and Marlene Tebo), who had her committed to The Cloisters while they try to gain control of the wealth.

A review

The lengths to which the three stepchildren go to recover the money delight Mrs. Savage, her fellow guests and the audience. Tebo is particularly effective as the worldly and self-center stepdaughter.

Playwright Patrick gave each of his characters a share of witty lines, but most of the play's charm flows from gentle humor rooted philosophy — rather than wit, rooted in malice.

One criterion for a well-played role is how seldom the audience is reminded it is only a role? On that basis, some of The Cloisters' guests fell short of complete success.

Larry Deaton, Martha Wardy and Shaunaey Teague met the challenge of investing their roles with a dignity the so-called normal characters lacked; they largely avoided condescension in their portrayal of the mentally ill.

But, occasionally in artificial tone of voice or mannerism, there were suggestions that they didn't quite believe the characters they were playing. The few reminders that these were actors in a sophisticated game of pretense broke the concentration of the audience of the audience and slightly flawed the play.

Martha Logan, the final guest, seemed most comfortable in her role. Another unqualified success was Judy Sheppard as psychiatrist Dr. Emmett. Sheppard's character consistently blended loyalty to her patients with cool professionalism.

Although Dalziel as Mrs. Savage muffed a few lines, she brought a gracious eccentricity and uninhibited charm to her role. Tebo, as the stepdaughter Lily Belle, had the powerful presence to bring her sophisticated femme fatale character to life.

Psychiatric nurse Miss Willie, played by Connie Whitlock, is the stereotypical nurse with a bright patronizing manner. In the final scene she delivers a minor O. Henry-style surprise to Mrs. Savage and the audience.

The playwright and the cast managed to carry off a light comedy while they injected a few less-than-lethal doses of thought and substance. Patrick places himself in the tradition of Oscar Wilde, who entertains by showing us what foolish creatures we can be.

The production was enhanced throughout by the judicious use of music, and the final scene made particularly effective use of a Pavane by Faure to set a sentimental closing mood.

The play will be presented Fridays and Saturdays at 8:30 p.m. through March 28 at the Community Theater on Proctor Boulevard.

Senior Center News

Two van loads of senior citizens left for a trip to the Oregon Legislature today at 8:30 a.m. from the Sandy Senior Center. They were to sit in on a hearing of the House Committee on Aging and Minority Affairs.

These meetings are open to the public and individuals are invited to testify on any issue being discussed. The group was to lunch in Salem and return early this evening.

The Humanities Class for Thursday, March 19, was cancelled.

Another special outing will take place tomorrow, March 20. Enthusiasts of the center's ceramics class will attend the Ceramics Show at the Portland Memorial Coliseum. The group will leave the center at 12:30 p.m. and return at 4:30 p.m.

The annual R.S.V.P. Open House is slated for this Monday, March 23, from 12:30 to 4:30 p.m. Seniors countywide will be given the V.I.P. treatment at Clackamas Community College. An opportunity to meet with other volunteers and view the central office set-up are among the benefits of this annual event, according to Sandy's volunteers.

The Sandy Senior Center will host the busy next Tuesday, March 24, at noon as a tribute to their support throughout the year. This year, crab and chicken will be served.

A loyal group of Winter Hawks fans will take advantage of a free spaghetti dinner offered at the Spaghetti Factory in Portland next Wednesday, March 25. Three extra tickets will be raffled off with the money going to the center's flower fund.

Activities for the Week of March 19 to March 26

Thursday, March 19
8:30 a.m. Trip to Salem for the Hearing on the House Committee on Aging and Minority Affairs
9 a.m. to 12 noon Drop In
9 a.m. Exercise Class
No Humanities Class Today
12 noon Loaves and Fishes

Friday, March 20
9a.m. to 12 noon Drop In
9:30 a.m. Arts and Crafts
12 noon Loaves and Fishes
12:30 to 4:40 p.m. Ceramics Show in Portland
1 p.m. Band Practice

Monday, March 23
9 a.m. to 12 noon Drop In
9:30 a.m. Exercise Class
10:30 a.m. Therapy Pool
12 noon Loaves and Fishes
12:30 to 4:30 p.m. R.S.V.P. Open House at CCC

Tuesday, March 24
9a.m. to 12 noon Drop In
12 noon Chamber of Commerce Honorary Dinner
1:30 a.m. Ceramics

Wednesday, March 25
9 a.m. to 12 noon Drop In
9 a.m. to 12 noon Tax Assistance
12 noon Loaves and Fishes
12 noon to 3 p.m. Fuel Assistance
12:30 p.m. In-house film: "Wapiti and Bighorn"
5:30 p.m. Spaghetti Dinner at Shaghetti Factory

Thursday, March 26
9 a.m. to 12 noon Drop In
9 a.m. Exercise Class
10 a.m. Humanities Class
12 noon Golden Age Club Potluck

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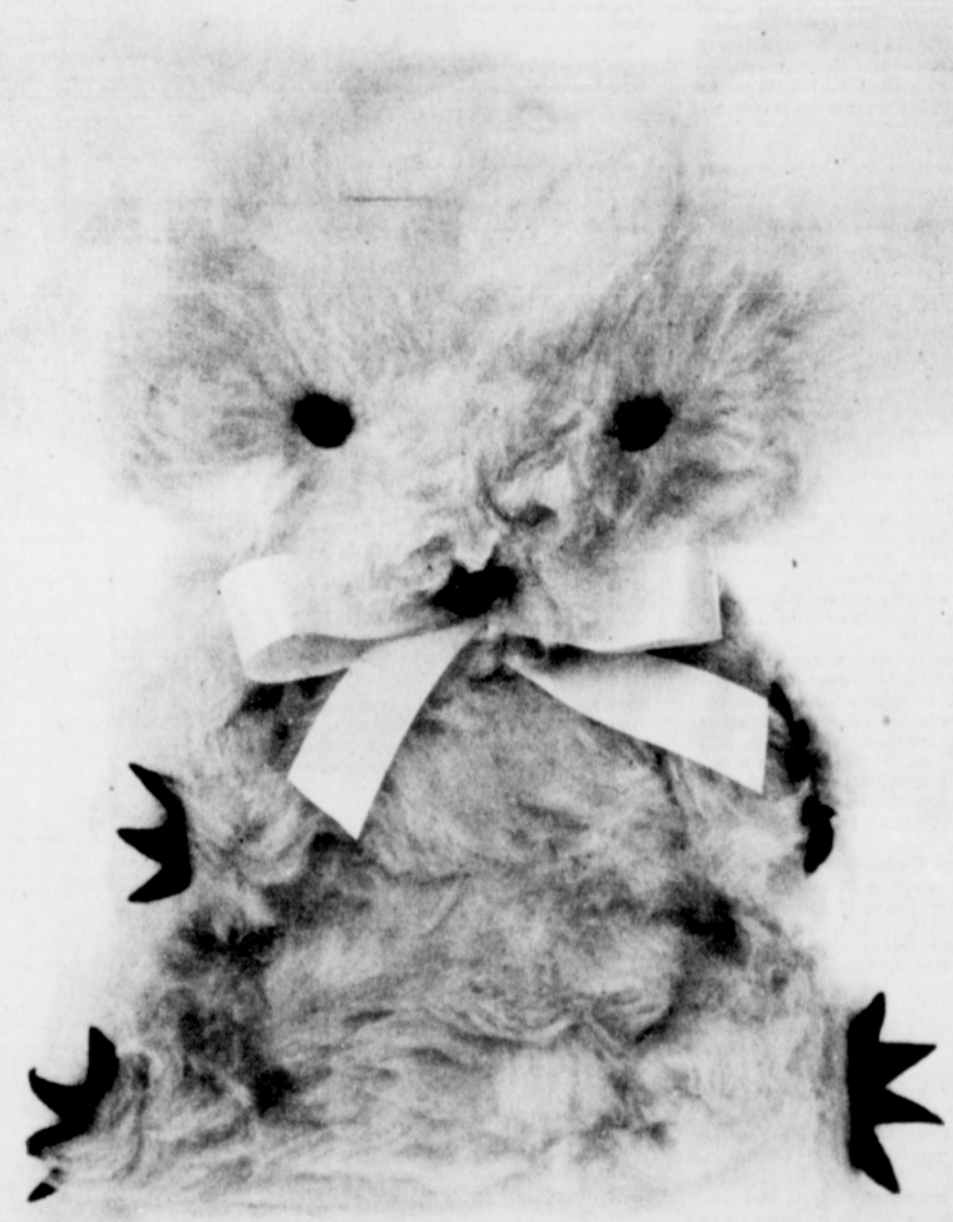
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