Ibsen's 'Master Builder' now at Image

By Charles Foster Ford

Ibsen is difficult to stage in-studio. Also, he is not so modern as he used to be. Nevertheless, John Paul Austin and the Image Theatre have put a credible production of "The Master Builder" into their three-quarter stage.

The matter of the play is a portrait, in actual, Ibsenian terms, of a successful, aging architect. He is presented first as a great, ruthless genius, jealous of his position, afraid he will soon be overcome by younger men. His inner turmoil is slowly revealed in the visit of a young girl, who tells him 10 years before her death of his one real triumph, a church with a very high steeple. Since that time, a guilty sense that he had somehow caused the death of his infant son had haunted all his successes, frustrated his marriage, and denied him all happiness. Climbing that steeple, to place a ceremonial wreath upon it, is made a symbol of freedom and success. The young girl's touch to freedom once more, but while attempting to destroy the symbolic feat, the architect fails at his deaths.

The play is really only a long dialogue between Halvard Solness and Nina Jeffers, played well by Peter Douglas MacLean and Susan Dorlen. Mr. MacLean in particularfiles his long path with subtlety and understanding. His hesitant expressions to be free from his rector's constraint of buried guilt may very well come. Miss Dorlen has learned much at Tullio Arena Theatre. Her quick dialogue movements contrive immediately with the deliberate, hesitant movements which she enters. Occasionally, however, her stunts of emotional display and determination betray a good actress using a style at variance with her fellows. Some of the best acting, however, comes from the minor roles. The little character-acts which are sprinkled through the play, Paul Benedict playing a small (Grout Brovik), whose one hope is to see his son begin a career before the end. As his son (Hagen), Louise Lopez-Cordova portrays effectively the frustrated anger of a young man eager to create something of his own at last. Janet Lane also contributes tiny gems. Her Kala Fonti is a fine little bookkeeper, engaged to Ranger, yet hopefully in love with Solness. Her posture, every gesture and inflection are thoroughly elegant. It is in such superb parts as these that one sees best what we have come to think of as the Image Theatre's style of acting.

They seem to imply rather than reveal their meaning, saying much more by manner of delivery than the lines say in themselves. Many times, Nina Jeffers as Mrs. Solness revealed much more in her few cryptic phrases than all of the lengthy confessions of Solness himself.

With playing such as this, where much more than the lines themselves is conveyed and understood, the real action of the play takes place in the minds of the audience, rather than on stage. In some scenes, Mr. MacLean could match this style, but Miss Dorlen, over-delivering her excellent quality, could not.

O'Neill's 'Ah, Wilderness' opens tonight at BU

Extempore O'Neill's comedy 'Ah, Wilderness' will be presented by Boston University tonight through Friday at the University Theatre, 64 Huntington Avenue, at 8:30 pm.

The play takes place in the midst of the 1920's, and young Ed, the only son of a wealthy paper manufacturer, is having a gay birthday party. An early birthday present, delivered by his poor boy, is a strange book, a "Life of Man," which, when read, shows Ed how to go about his business. He then proceeds to sell his father's paper business to the boy, and to make his way as a writer for the boy, who has taken over the business. The play is a satire on the 1920's, and a critique of the American dream. The play is well directed by Peter Douglas MacLean, and is well acted by the entire cast. The play is a success, and should be seen by all who enjoy good theatre.