drama at mit...

'Firebugs': a study in indecision

By Sherry Gulman

Max Frisch's "The Firebugs", presented by the MIT Community players at Kresge Little Thea-

tre is a simultaneously poetic and invigorating portrayal of the dis-

aster that can arise from an in-

sufficient grasp of moral deci-

sion. Gottfried Behrendtman re-

presented everyone's deeply played by

Ray Lussier, he is a pompous

middle class businessman, de-

tached to his job, and easily frus-

trated by such things as the sit-

uations of his employees and the

sagging of his wife. His primary

problem in the play is a couple

of pyromaniacs who have been

igniting all the best houses in

town. They come to call on Joe

Schmitz, portrayed by Tom

Sheahan, a hulking, clumsy wor-

king class type who displays a

disgusting lack of taste and
despicable manners. Ransom Scott,

who plays his mentor, Willie

Eliscour, is nauseating and snob-

cated, with a sparkle in his eye

and a taste for the finer things

of life. Throughout the first two

acts, these two trip back and

forth from the kitchen to the

atrium, chatting with the Beider-

manns and the firebugs, and in-

voking several of their his-

tories. Behrendtman, who is

fond of politics, is a kind

character, and Joe Schmitz sings

dirty nursery

rhymes while he gnaws on a

drumstick. In general, the atmos-

phere is rather charmed,

and the climaxes come when Herr

Beidermann gives matches to the

Firebugs. After all, "if they really

were firebugs, they would have

their own." After an interminable

string of stage effects to represent

the burning of the Beidermanns'

dominion, the city, and the world

in general, the play ends with a

dryly humorous, pseudo-symphonic

epilogue. It takes place in hell, and

it is apparently an after-

thought. Joe and Willy return as

chief devils to give continuity to

the action, and the Beidermann's

sardonic maid, Anna, comes into

the full flower of her glory as

Beidermann's private secretary

merely by steering a pair of min-

or stockings.

However, the epilogue is pri-

marily a string of choice dialogue

in which hell goes on strike be-

cause heaven gets all the really

big names on their roster. It is

enjoyable, but it doesn't have

much to do with the point of the

play.

Frisch's real message is

brought to the audience as much

by the image itself as by the

players. Because of his moral

weakness, Beidermann cannot

acknowledge the existence of the

sinfulness of the firebugs because,

by doing so, he obliges himself to

make some form of decision

about them. One is aware of Beid-

ernmann's problem from the very

beginning, but helpless even to

take a stand on it, because no

one can escape as a Beider-

mann and the producer must

choose one of what to do about all

the other Beidermanns in the world.

This helplessness is reflected by

the most entertaining character

of the play, the chorus.

"The Firebugs" is a parody of the

classic Greek choruses, the chorus

sits silent by a bench in the lamp-post

坐标, waiting for something to

happen so they can go into action.

A sort of parody of the classic Greek

chorus, they oscillate from homely

parody of the classic Greek chor-

us, they oscillate from homely

human frailty, and director Wil-

es in language that is either

dry or light enough to be biting without

overwhelming.

Marrakesh [11:30, 2:00, 5:00],

"M middity," 10:00, 1:35, 5:25, 9:10; 

"Girl on a Motorcycle," 11:05, 2:05, 5:05,

"Living on Dead," 11:05, 2:05, 5:05,

"The Quiet One," 11:05, 2:05, 5:05,

"The Firebugs," 11:05, 2:05, 5:05;

matinee Sat. 3:30. Where? Mit. When?

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day at 8:00.

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