Tonight at 8:30: three scenes of variety

By William Schaffer

Tonight at 8:30, the latest presentation by the MIT Community Players, is a work that lives up to the reputation of the company—a reputation founded on being one of the best theatre groups at MIT while at the same time being one of the least known. The Players have, as always, drawn their talent from all segments of the MIT community to put together a lively and successful show.

A Noel Coward classic, Tonight at 8:30 consists of three separate, unrelated acts with the "English way of life" serving as the sole cohesive theme.

The first segment, "Ways and Means," concerns itself with the dilemma of a destitute couple in the middle of the Riviera. Stella and Toby Cartwright wrangle their way out of debt by collaborating with an ex-chauffeur to rob a friend. Blanch Garfein and William DiPasquale play the impoverished pair with flair and a knack for Coward's lines which no other actor in the show could match. "Fumed Oak," the second vignette, is a portrait of a man who decides to leave his wife after fifteen years of marriage. Michael Morris gives the best performance of the evening as the husband who stands secure against the railing of his wife, daughter, and mother-in-law as he tries to make them see that he finally knows who he is and what he wants to do with his life. Morris's presentation is outstanding.

"Red Peppers," the final scene, is the worst of the three. Nearly incomprehensible when performed well, this scene suffered badly from a lackluster performance with dropped lines, mediocre acting, and poor lighting. The Players' direction doesn't get behind the humorous sketch, the dance numbers and backstage banter to point up the main theme: the feelings and interactions of a married couple who have been on stage with each other for more years than either cares to remember. Neither Debbie LeMieux or Jeff Schwartz, who play Lily and George Pepper, is a dancer. They pant heavily throughout the entire act. And to add insult to injury, neither should have attempted any type of British accent without far more work.

The set for all three vignettes consists of a back wall, door, and window, with interchangeable curtains and furniture. This arrangement works only in "Fumed Oak", as "Ways and Means" makes it look run-down and it seems too nice for "Red Peppers." Costumes by Ellen Mason are good, especially in "Ways and Means."

With the exception of a few flaws mentioned above, Tonight at 8:30 was a success, and was received well by the audience. The next MIT Community Players production is Hamlet, scheduled for February, with tryouts scheduled for February 14-17.