**Dickinson Lives In The Belle of Amherst**

Julie Harris is an accomplished actress who has at one time or another played in everything from Greek theatre to operatic musicals, both on and off Broadway. In *The Belle of Amherst* Miss Harris calls for all of this vast acting experience to make the play into a brilliant rendering of Emily Dickinson.

The script is written as a monologue between Miss Harris and the audience. Since Miss Harris is the only character in the play, she is forced to portray not only Emily Dickinson, but all of the people that Dickinson reminisces about as well. A high level of skill and concentration is required to stand up on a stage for two hours and do this, but Miss Harris succeeds in her endeavor admirably.

The play itself opens on a delightful note, with Miss Dickinson busting about and describing her favorite recipe. The first half of the play then proceeds to explore the character of Emily Dickinson. She quickly establishes herself as an opinionated and very eccentric old woman. Her mixed feelings in a very clear and amazing way: her self-deprecating attitude establishes her as a very likable person.

This portion of the play also explores Miss Dickinson’s surroundings: current events at Amherst College, the group of her neighbors, and the like. This material is presented in a series of seemingly unrelated diversions but it all ties in Dickinson in a resonant, random monologue. The result is just the type of improvisation that one would expect on a visit to a valuable old woman who lived alone.

As the untold, however, its treatment of her life becomes progressively more serious. Miss Harris plays the second half of the play the genteel, steady, heavy. Miss Dickinson delves more and more into her past, exploring both the happiest and the saddest experiences of her rich life. She dwells a lot on the deaths of different members of her family. In this unburdening of her soul, she opens up a gold mine of emotions in the audience. The effect is simultaneously sad and yet very uplifting; her wistful memories provide the most beautiful and moving portions of the evening.

Julie Harris does an excellent job in bringing out all of the complexities and contradictions inherent in Miss Dickinson’s character. It is very difficult to sustain a high level of intensity throughout the length of a play, but Miss Harris manages to pull it off brilliantly. When she digresses about her love relationship with poet Wadsworth, her manner is suffering and angry. One cannot help being sucked up into her emotional pain. Unfortunately, in her fits of passion she frequently drags in bits and pieces of Dickinson’s poetry. This would be a problem with Miss Harris’ portrayal, for it is hard to imagine someone so upset uttering stanzas of poetry, however deeply inspired. This is more a problem of the script than any flaw in acting, however. So although Emily Dickinson’s story is told in a series of unrelated parts, the result of Miss Harris’ performance is whole and entirely.

One comes away from the play with a deep and humble respect for the poet, as well as an appreciation for her greatness and strength of character. Her performance is marked by the abrupt transitions that take place between Dickinson’s digressions. It is Miss Harris’ credit that she can change the mood of the play almost instantly. She also makes optimum use of the beautiful set provided for her, moving the action all about the stage. With the mind’s eye it becomes possible to enter into the scenery of her imagination, though it does not exist upon the stage itself.

*The Belle of Amherst* is a play that is both well written and beautifully performed. The exploration of Miss Dickinson’s inner self can strike many familiar chords in the audience and offer some very powerful words.

The Emily Dickinson portrayed here is very deep and yet disarmingly human. Her honest self appraisal should be of great value to anyone who appreciates the intricacies of the human soul.

— Joseph Krist

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**Movies**

**Key Largo**, the Midnite Movie, Saturday, December 7, 8:30 pm at The Space. Ft. 7 & 10, 26-100. For more information and lodging: Call 354-5678.

**The African Queen** (Classic), Fri., 7:30, 10-250. The MIT Symphony, Concerto in G Major, will perform on Thursday, December 19, at 8:30 pm in the T-Club Lounge of Phillips. For information call 262-1120.

**Miss Dickenson’s* concept of" the" idea is a play that is

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**on the town**

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**Music**

The MIT Jazz Bands will present a joint concert Friday, December 7, at 7pm in Walker; admission free.

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**for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 36 by Howard Hanson (David List, soloist) and Symphony No. 1 in B-flat Major, Op. 38, by Schumann. Admission is free.**

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**Theater**

The MIT Dance Workshop and students of Mark Ammon’s Acting 1 class present an informal showing of student works. Directed by Beth Sull (dance) and Mark Ammon (acting), Friday, December 14, at 8:30 pm in the T-Club Lounge of Dupont. Admission is free. For further information call 253-2908 or 253-4456.

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**BO$**

Today (matinee) and tomorrow (evening) Fritha Perlman plays the Beethoven Piano Concerto with the BSO. Perlman is one of my favorite violinists (after Isaac Stern and Pinchas Zukermand); a true soul-musician and, intimately involved in his music, demands the attention of his audience. The audience can sense his performance, and as a result gets all the more pleasure from listening to him. Perlman is booked in Symphony’s ‘Sacred and Profane’ tour. He will also be performed by Perlman, and the Oak by the same composer. Off course plays both performances.

On December 18-21 (evening) and 22 (matinee and evening) a program of Chavez, Bolcom, and Tchaikovsky’s *Symphony No. 6*. On December 21 I am going to get some “piano” performances somehow or other; I hope you will too.

— Jonathan Richmond

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