

The MIT Community Players act up a storm

MIT Community Players presents *The Tempest*, by William Shakespeare, directed by James Williams. Performances Feb. 28 and 29 and March 1 at 8 pm in Burton Dining Hall.

Burton's Dining Hall has been transformed into a remarkably clever theater by the MIT Community Players, a small amateur drama group on campus. As it stands now, the room could hold no more than 50 people; the actual turnout has typically been about half that. This stage provides a small but cozy setting for the Community Players' production of *The Tempest*, Shakespeare's fantasy about a mysterious Mediterranean island world.

The Tempest centers around Prospero, the rightful Duke of Milan, who was cheated of his dukedom and set adrift upon the sea to die with his daughter. Instead they were washed up on an island, of which Prospero became lord through his wizardry. The play itself deals with this situation years later, when Prospero brings to the island with his magic those men who wronged him. After the unforeseen marriage of his daughter and an attempt upon his life, Prospero forgives his enemies and regains his dukedom.

In the Community Players' production, Prospero is portrayed by Harvey Phillips. He does an admirable job in making Prospero into a wise and virtuous philosopher. It is Phillips' acting that glues the play together and keeps it moving through the many slow spots. The rest of the acting is adequate to keep the play alive, though the jester Trinculo, played by Richard Lindo, can also be singled out for a praiseworthy effort.

The performance opens on a rather confused note, with the sound effects drowning out the shouting of the actors as they jump about the stage in simulation of a shipwreck. Once the scene moves to the island, however, the action settles down, and the plot begins to unfold. Unfortunately, the tempo drags in many spots, especially during the actors' monologues — a Shakespearean specialty. The dependence upon the background music for scene and mood changes also becomes excessive at times. In particular, the marriage of Miranda and Ferdinand is rendered obscure by the impossibility to understand the speeches above the din. The Community Players also rely heavily upon special effects such as black lighting, strobes, and spouts of smoke. They would be better off if they concentrated more on the script and acting to set the mood and let Shakespeare's genius come through.

The production does have its high points. Caliban, Prospero's treacherous slave, shouts and grunts about the stage in a manner reminiscent of the cookie



Photo by Paul Green, courtesy of MIT Community Players.

monster from Sesame Street. His wrestling match with the jester comes off as very humorous indeed. Ariel, a spirit bound in Prospero's service, mimics the wizard at

times with great effect. The pace of the play does pick up towards the end, and the final scene successfully ties the loose ends together.

The set is an imaginative solution to the problem of creating a stage within a dining hall. Unfortunately, the stage material is transparent in many spots to the lights along Amherst Alley that shine in through the dining hall windows. A good feature of the set is that the audience seats are placed right on the very edge of the stage. This draws the spectators right into the action of the unfolding story. It is fortunate that the company plays to a small house, though, for the performance does not really reach out beyond the first three rows of seats.

The MIT Community Players is a drama organization composed of such diverse elements as graduate students, Institute workers, alumni and others associated with the MIT community. They are an ad-hoc amateur group that has been active on campus since 1947. Although their production of *The Tempest* does not shine like a professional performance would, it still manages to provide good entertainment in its own way. Their efforts are worth a sampling this weekend.

Joe Kristl

Superb View is worth seeing

A View from the Bridge, by Arthur Miller. Production by the MIT Shakespeare Ensemble, performances on Feb. 28, 29 at 8pm and on March 1 at 2:30pm, in 10-250. Also at Wellesley on March 8 at 8pm.

One comes to expect excellence from MIT — and the Shakespeare Ensemble fulfills these expectations. Their production of Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge* is as good, if not better, than any professional theater performance. The Ensemble uses 10-250 well. By constructing an austere set and using 10-250 like a Greek amphitheater, the Ensemble turns the lecture hall's limitations into assets.

Although the light crew suffered from timing problems and the actors' pseudo-Italian accents were distracting, the performance had no other faults. The acting was restrained, while the play was effectively paced.

Miller's play is strongly reminiscent of classical drama. The cast is small, the set simple. The tension in the play builds up solely from the dialogue, while Alfieri's narration lends an air of unreality to the performance — as if Alfieri's memories were presenting a dream. This is an imitation of life.

Eddie Carbone is a man like any other man, yet he is singled out by fate for disaster. Had his cousins not arrived from Sicily, he would not have been forced into his fatal choice. Eddie is overly protective of his niece Catherine. It is doubtful that he would find any man worthy of her. When



Anne Frates comforts Daria Martell in the MIT Shakespeare Ensemble's production of *A View from the Bridge*. (Photo by John Lepingwell, courtesy of Technique.)

she falls in love with Rodolpho, Eddie will not let her go. Thus, he is forced into deciding between losing his niece to marriage and turning in his cousins to the Immigration Service. To let his niece marry is to lose a part of his life. Yet, to betray his cousins is a violation of his principles. Eddie's tragedy arises from his inability to adapt — "settling for half," as Alfieri says.

A View from the Bridge contains all the

elements of classical tragedy: a hero; his destiny, catastrophe, and catharsis. The Shakespeare Ensemble's performance enhances these classical qualities; 10-250 is transformed into an intimate stage while the cast's acting sweeps the audience towards the inevitable climax. They have presented an absorbing performance of a moving play.

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Pudding's A Little Knife Music: a production not to be mousseed

The Hasty Pudding Theatricals presents *A Little Knife Music*, written by Andrew Sellon, with music by Michael Schubert, directed and choreographed by Pamela Hunt. Playing at the Hasty Pudding Clubhouse through March 19.

It has been said that the pun is both the highest and lowest form of humor. *A Little Knife Music* proves it. This show, written (by his own admission) by "the same kind of [deranged] mind that makes the Harvard Lampoon possible," delights the audience by leaving no laugh ungot and no groan unearned.

Hasty Pudding, the third oldest theatrical organization in the world, has remained true to its traditions for the past hundred and thirty-two years. For instance, the cast is made up entirely of men. Even the women are men. Also, Pudding plots have customarily been borrowed from contemporary professional theater pieces. This year is no exception. *Knife Music* starts out as an obvious adaptation of the current Broadway hit, *Sweeney Todd*, but from there, the story's ridiculous twists and ironies would have made O. Henry proud.

As the play opens, the treacherous Helena Baskitt (John Bellucci — and no, he's not that one) has just returned to London from America, where she (he?) has

been in exile for the last twenty years after supposedly killing her husband in order to pursue her true love, a judge named, of all things, Lorne Order (Jamie Hanes.) She would have hanged for her crime, but managed to let Lorne (who just happened to have been prosecutor of the case) know that their blossoming romance had been very fruitful, and that the fruit would be



ripe in just about nine months. Ridden with guilt, Lorne raises the child, Mae B. Thistyme (Doug Fitch), as his ward with the help of his beadle, Beadle Bailey (Shipleigh John Munson), and a governess, Lavinia Truly (David Levi.) Helena wants not only to reclaim her long-lost daughter, but to wreak vengeance upon Lorne. To this end, she has opened a bagel shop,

where she serves cream cheese lace with "The Weed" — a deadly poison which conveniently causes its victims to burst into song just before they expire. Mae, meanwhile, has fallen in love with one of Helena's bagel peddlers, Evan Ownlinose (Frank M. Pastor), despite the judge's best efforts to marry her off to the annoying Lord Howie Bugznie (Dan Breslin.) Anyway, it would be an exercise in futility to try to explain exactly what happens, but the Kamikaze fly, the clairvoyant gypsy and the chorus of dancing whores all help to make the show very... uh... right up to the surprise ending.

The musical numbers were all wonderful, with the possible exception of the title song, which opens the show. The only goof of the Pudding, as it were, was leading off with such a weak musical sequence. Once past it, however, the songs were delightfully tuneful, with hysterically witty lyrics. "Naughty Victorians" playfully exposed what Lavinia and the Beadle, not to mention the rest of the judge's domestic help, were up to in the privacy of their own home ("We don't mean to cast aspersions/ But our 'fly-by-night' perversions/ Have a tendency to rival ancient Rome!") "The Termination Tango" proved to be a tremendous vehicle for Willis Emmons to show off his fine dexterity as a dancer as

Edgar Foo Yung, Helena's greasy Chinese dope supplier. Especially worthy of commendation were "Love-Lorne," a four-part aria which revealed the mixed emotions with which Helena, Lorne, Mae and Evan looked forward to a reunion, as well as the scene in which three very realistic-looking statues get up and sing "Rock-a-Bye your Baby with a Monumental Love Song." And it all worked up to an absolutely dynamite finale.

The play was extremely well cast. Surprisingly enough, the best actors were the ones in the women's roles. David Levi was very effective as the deceptively prudish Lavinia. John Bellucci grimaced his way around the stage as the evil Helena, showing off a rich bass voice and a great pair of legs. But the unquestionable show-stealer was Doug Fitch, as the empty-headed Mae, who demonstrated through this role that he indeed missed his true vocation in life by being born male. Mournfully torching his way through "Candied" or gleefully bursting into spontaneous tap-dance in "Bagels and Locks," he was a real delight to watch.

A Little Knife Music is tremendously entertaining. As the program promises, you'll die laughing.

Linda Schaffir