College groups present a mixed bag of theater in New Hampshire

THE AMERICAN COLLEGE THEATER FESTIVAL
At Keene State College, New Hampshire.

By JULIAN WEST

IT WAS BITTERLY COLD IN KEENE, NEW HAMPSHIRE two weeks ago at the local competition in the American College Theater Festival. Waiting for the MIT Shakespeare Ensemble to arrive was a numbing experience. The big stage of the art center, a monolithic brickyard on the campus of Keene State College, was envir-

oned by few distinguished performances. The outlook for the festival was as dreary as the New Hampshire winter. I knew that in their special adaptation of "A Midsummer Night's Dream," the Shakespeare Ensemble had a smoothly etched standard production of "Playboy" imagin-

able. The set looked dazzlingly authentic, a phrenological tavern interior. The costumes were equally authentic, claimed the directors, perennial ACTF participants Donald and Joanne Rathspe. To audience members, however, some appeared ju-

ringly colorful.

But even less realistic than the costumes was the Irish brogue. It was at least 10 minutes before the audience learned to cut through the afflicted accents, by which time we had lost track of the plot. Some of the actors had worked so hard at per-

fecting their accents that they lost track of what they were saying. What is unfortu-

nate is that some good performances, by Joe McGarraghon as Shawn Keogh and Dave Duggan as Peter Mika, were lost in the shuffle.

The better production on Thursday was a one-woman play called "Clytemnestra, or Crime." Unfortunately, few people were able to see it, as it was appropriately pro-

duced in the smaller studio theater. The text, translated from a 1935 French essay by Margaret Voucousor, adapted remark-

ably well to the theater. And the perfor-

mance, by Phoebe McBride of Trinity Col-

lege, was stunning. As a regal and sensual Clytemnestra, she confronted her male lovers — the audience — and explained her reasons for killing her husband, Aga-

memnon.

The same character received a different and less successful treatment on Friday afternoon from the local troupe, Keene State College Theater, as they put on a production of Euripides' late play, "Iphig-

eneas at Aulis." Euripides was writing about the futility of war, arguing by impli-

cation against the destructive war being waged against Sparta by his native Athens. Director Edith Notman hoped to make a parallel, contemporary statement with her production.

But drafting an assembly of Madison lookalikes to portray the chorus is not en-

ough to make a pity contemporary. And since the chorus was played on a tape re-

corder, drowned out by music and the shouting of the chorus, it was impos-

sible to understand a good fraction of the text. Two or three good performances were not enough to rescue the remainder. It was with this in our minds that we welcomed the group from MIT on Friday afternoon. They were greeted by the other students with a mixture of enthusiasm and suspicion. Enthusiasm, because everyone was looking forward to a production of "Dream" as it lampooned actors, it is ideally well to the theater. And the performance in Keene, the possibility must be considered that the ensemble will be asked to. The decision as to which produc-

tions to invite from around the country will be made in about a week's time.

What is the secret of the MIT Shake-

peare Ensemble? Their theater was alive and spontaneous, an event which made the audience want to laugh too clever and fos-

tilized by comparison.

Shakespeare Ensemble has two secrets. The first is an abiding love for Shakespeare which exists in profusion among the mem-

bers of the group. The second is the sense of ensemble, of teamwork which exists among its members.

Perhaps I overstate the case, but I am sure of one thing. For all the excellence in New Hampshire, I was part of something warm and magical.

MARCH 1, 1987 is the deadline for graduating seniors to submit Phase One or Phase Two papers to the Committee on the Writing Requirement.

No degrees will be awarded in June to students who have not completed the Writing Requirement.

Margaret MacVicar, Dean for Undergraduate Education
William T. Peake, Chair, Committee on Academic Performance
Kenneth Hoffman, Chair, Committee on the Writing Requirement