

Actors succeed; props fail

By Joanne Rife
Special to The Dispatch

To paraphrase Shakespeare: The prop's the thing wherein we'll catch the attention of the audience.

Well, close.

Gilroy Community Theatre struck out (in both senses of the phrase) into the blood and guts genre with *Wait Until Dark*, Frederick Knott's heart-palpating play about some badies out to get the blind heroine.

The production was not so much a strike out as a long blooper to the right fielder for an out. The play had its points of excitement along the long course of flight, but in the end it was not enough to win the game.

For a suspense drama to work, it must be taut, stringing its audience along on a thin, cutting wire, moving quickly before they can spot all the weaknesses of the tale. But GCT's *Wait Until Dark*, under the direction of Debbie Nelson, was loose. It ambled, stumbling about, unfocused.

Part of the problem was a considerable case of opening night jitters on the part of cast and props. Both were fumbling their lines and their telephone rings. I think this coming weekend will see an improvement.

The play is physical, and my only fear is that the props will not stand up to the abuse. They may be all worn out. *Wait Until Dark* is full of crashes and bangs, bodies hurtled down stairs and through doors, chairs knocked over and dishes flying.

There were two excellent performances — the first by Rosalind Farotte as the blind Susy. Not once did she fall out of the part; sustaining blindness throughout a difficult and demanding role.

The entire play rests on her ability to be believably blind and to have to deal with a threatening situation that is at first unknown to her, and when finally realized, dealt with as it must be dealt with in a world without sight. Farotte remained in control of her part through a hazardous evening.

The other stellar performance was put in by Eric McDonald — in this role, king of slime. He gave me the same goosebumps as did the giggling killer played by Richard Widmark in the classic *Kiss of Death* (he pushed his crippled mother down the stairs and smiled).

McDonald embodied evil in the part of Roat with all the enthusiasm of witches for flying brooms. He was thinking bad thoughts with sly, slitted eyes from the moment he walked on stage with his (inoperative — another prop problem) switch blade. He is just not the type one would invite home for dinner without serving poisoned Bloody Marys.

Greg Guerin was the bumbling Carlino and took the part of a penny ante con man smoothly, although he was slapdash and apparently not enthused about the plot.

Bob Fairless as Mike was too nice and too handsome for the part of a petty crook, the one in the trio who turned out to have a heart of gold. He was too much the hero type to give a sense of the danger his presence posed for Susy.

Jamie Ferraris was the snippy little girl, Gloria. Ferraris delighted in having the chance to act like a hellion and those were her best moments.

Wait Until Dark is an interesting play, taking an uncommon incident and forcing us to "see" through the limitations of a "spunky" blind woman. The GCT production fell short of the polish and enthusiasm I've come to expect from the group. However, it was opening night, and the crowd at Gilroy High Theater was sparse. The play had too many other events to compete with that night and the small audience may have affected the players.

Wait Until Dark needs tighter control, it needs to move faster. Farotte and McDonald almost, but not quite, redeem the production all by themselves.

Now if the players could just get control of those props. This is not a play directed by a poltergeist, although there were moments when it appeared to be.

'Wait Until Dark' deserves a second chance

EDITOR:

It is unfortunate that newspaper theater reviews are a one-shot affair. Joanne Rife, who reviewed "Wait Until Dark" for *The Dispatch*, saw the play when there were problems with the sound and special effects — and this play relies on those effects for its timing and suspense.

But when my group of nine saw it last Saturday night, everything worked beautifully. We all thought it was great entertainment and the rest of the audience seemed to share our appreciation. The audience was small, however, unusual for a Gilroy Community Theater production.

I know that it is not practical

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for a newspaper to review the same play again, but this one deserves another chance by everyone who might have been negatively influenced by Rife's experience. The last performances are this coming Friday and Saturday night.

Ken McDonald, Gilroy

GCT's Wait... is compelling

—EVENING FREE LANCE, Thursday, November 11, 1982

By CAROL SELLEN

Special to the Free Lance
The Gilroy Community Theatre opened its fall season Nov. 5, with a dark suspense that should have been a Halloween special. Three sleazy men try to outwit a "gutsy" blind homemaker in F. Knott's "Wait Until Dark."

Unfortunately Saturday's performance was more a "trick" than a "treat." The pace is slow, with intermittent high spots.

Part of the problem is built right into the script. Knott's wrote the first act with a lot of exclamation, and little action. Talk, talk,

Review

talk does become tiring, especially when the actors don't interject interesting bits of business and have a shallow emotional range.

The second act had a lot of action. Up went the pace, and when the tension started to mount, it went on and on without relief.

The audience needs periodic releases of tension or it will find little things to laugh at, which normally they wouldn't waste a "ha" on.

SUSPENSE

But the audience enjoyed the physical part. Furniture knocked over, banging of pots and pans, lights going off and on, and a body falling down the stairs left people holding their breath.

And with the growing suspense, you realize this is the "treat" and are ready to put another candle in your pumpkin.

Rosalind Farotte, as the blind Susy, is the pivot on which this play turns. An accomplished actress, she sustained the believability of her blindness through the entire play.

Handling threatening situations in the manner of an intelligent blind person was realistic and you followed her line of thought through the play.

Her strength in stage techniques helped some actors to appear better than they are, when they are in scenes together.



Harry Roat (Eric McDonald) attempts to force Susy Hendrix (Rosalind Farotte) to reveal the whereabouts of a doll containing narcotics, in the Gilroy Community

Theatre production of Frederick Knott's suspense drama "Wait Until Dark." The play continues Friday and Saturday; Nov. 19 and 20.

SHIVERS

Eric McDonald, as Mr. Roat, was the epitome of slimy evil. His emotions and bearing could send shivers down one's spine. There was a resemblance to Richard Widmark, as he walked across the stage with a smile of enjoyment, seeing his victim's astonishment, that she is trapped and under his control.

Sam, Susy's husband, is a small part but handled well by Eric Hilding. He handled his props well while being realistic and convincing. Too bad his part wasn't larger.

For the first time on stage Jamie Ferraris, as Gloria, did very well. She particularly shines in the bratty squabbles with Susy. In fact she does so well, one could assume she was a natural in the part.

But it's all work, acting. Bob Fairless is either playing the part of Mike as a nice guy or he hasn't come to terms with the multifaceted nature of the part. He plays the part too soft and kind to have a shred of evil in him.

There was not the sense of possible danger.

Debbie Nelson is well known in Gilroy and San

Jose for her work in the theater, but this is her first direction of a suspense play. A suspense play should be taut and if she could squeeze a few more rehearsals before this coming weekend, this could make a big difference.

"Wait Until Dark" could still be a total "treat" and I would bet my hat on that.

Performances are at 8 p.m. Friday, Saturday; also Nov. 19, 20, at the Gilroy High School Theatre.

For information call 842-SHOW.