

CRITIC'S BEAT

Director Scores Double Hit at Chapel, Kentwood

Directors are often the forgotten men in community theater.

Not so with Lou Bruhnke, who scored a double triumph this past weekend with the opening of Arthur Miller's "After the Fall" at Chapel Theatre. Director Bruhnke opened "Fall" just one week after a smash opening of Tennessee Williams' "The Rose Tattoo" at the Kentwood Players' Westchester Playhouse.

Directors are just that—they must cast the play, block the stage movements, help the actors to project themselves and their roles, and piece the scenes together—bit by bit—until they have fashioned the finished production.

Bruhnke does just that—

with the feel of a master craftsman.

WHAT BRUHNKE has done with "Tattoo" and "Fall," however, is more than just simple direction. He has fashioned the two plays into some of the best little theater seen in this area in several seasons.

"The Rose Tattoo" is Williams' story of a Sicilian woman whose love for her dead husband nearly ruins her life and that of her daughter. The woman, Serafina, worshipped her husband and when he is killed she retreats into her home with her daughter and her husband's ashes.

Her reactions when she learns her husband had been having an affair with another woman and her determination to break up her daughter's romance with a sailor are the heart of the play—a study in the emotions of love, and hate, and fear.

As Serafina, Darlene Chaffee is superb. If there is one word which characterizes her performance, it is spontaneity. She is an intense, dedicated actress who gives the role everything she has.

MISS CHAFFEE is backed

up by three very fine performers who have brought the same quality of spontaneity to the Kentwood stage.

They are Madeleine Drake as Rosa, Serafina's daughter; Herb L. Stillman as Jack Hunter, Rosa's sailor; and Jerry Krane, who portrays Alvaro, the man who finally cracks Serafina's wall of isolation and self-pity.

One of the best scenes in the play involves Miss Chaffee, Stillman, and Miss Drake. This initial confrontation between mother and boyfriend is heightened by the quick wit and snappy dialogue which results in Serafina's getting a promise out of the sailor "to protect the innocence of Rosa," then permitting the pair to go off on a picnic.

THE SCENE is typical of the intense and dedicated performances given by the principle characters.

But Bruhnke also has succeeded when many a director fails—especially in community theater. His cast does not have the usual number of weak character performers. Each comes on the stage as if his role were most important to the story—and the result is a production which must be

rated as one of the best of the Kentwood season.

Especially good are the performances of Beverly Bammes (Estelle), Edythe Sills (Flora), Carol Kerster (Bessie), and Sally Pierce (Assunta).

Others in the cast include Greg McBride, Verna Mae Green, Thelma Anderson, Lee Webster, Wallace Johnson, Ralph McCraw, Winkie Caraway, and Dick Bega.

Naomi Berkson designed the somewhat crowded, but effective set and lights are handled by Rich Holmes.

"AFTER THE Fall" is one of those plays which could easily become a bore. It is Miller's adaptation of the life of Marilyn Monroe and the playwright has been soundly criticized for writing it. But he has written it and theater groups undoubtedly will continue to perform it.

The action takes place on an abstract set—in the mind of Quentin. It is long and highly emotional—often requiring sharp changes in at-

titude on the part of the performers.

Jack Drake is starred as Quentin and his choice to play the role was most fortunate. "After the Fall" must be carried by Quentin and Drake does this exceptionally well.

THE PLAY is difficult to stage and the fact that the movement in this production is smooth and carefully timed is a tribute to Bruhnke's skill as a director. Drake easily steps in and out of the scenes, talking to himself—or the audience if you prefer—at one moment and fully engrossed in a "present" scene in the next.

Again, Bruhnke has assembled a strong supporting cast. Joan Addams is perfect as Maggie (Monroe's counterpart, it is said), and Dorothy Tunis and Robert Connor are very good as mother and father.

Others who give very good accounts are Lynda Scardino, Jo Lasman, Suzanne Mangano, Nita Paschall, Margaret Middleton, Austin

Rheingold, Murray Rubin, and Judy Price.

THE ONLY weak link is the part of Dan—Quentin's brother—played by Richard Jordahl. And it is not the performance which is weak so much as it is the part—one which is not really necessary to the play.

"After the Fall" is a mind probing drama of frankly dubious theatrical value. But that is not Chapel's fault. It is, as staged by Bruhnke, a very fine production and worth seeing, if not for its value, then for its method.

And the fact that Bruhnke has managed to do so well with two so difficult plays should establish him as one of the best directors active in community theater here.

"The Rose Tattoo" will play weekends through Feb. 17 at the Westchester Playhouse, 8301 S. Hindry Ave., while "After the Fall" will be at the new Chapel Theatre, 2222 W. Lomita Blvd., weekends through Feb. 24.—J.R.

Lapidary Group Road Work Plans Meeting Authorized

Dorothy Craig and June Lang will present a program on "Rockhounding in Australia" at the Feb. 5 meeting of the South Bay Lapidary and Mineral Society.

The meeting is scheduled at Clark Stadium, 861 Valley Drive, Hermosa Beach, at 7:30 p.m. Visitors are welcome.

Improvement of a 510-foot section of 213th Street between Selwyn Avenue and the San Diego Freeway has been authorized.

Work will consist of widening the pavement to join the curb and gutter recently constructed under county permit by the owners of the adjacent properties.

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Training Sessions Planned

In-service training sessions are being conducted for Torrance first, second, and third grade teachers to acquaint them with new materials to be used in teaching English next year.

Third grade teachers will meet Tuesday, Feb. 6, at 3:30 p.m., at Torrance Elementary School with Miss Trisha Wilkinson, linguistics consultant.

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