

Characterization Key In 'Gazebo'

By James McCafferty
Of The Dispatch Staff

Otterbein Summer Theater got things off to a solid start Wednesday with a rollicking performance of *The Gazebo*.

By run's end Sunday, audiences may be applauding the makings of an all-star company.

THE REASONS are many, but the basic ingredient is characterization completely understood — not only in the delivery of dialogue but also in the all-important area of making movements look natural.

Director Charles W. Dodrill has sacrificed nothing in setting a brisk pace. Set design by Fred J. Thayer serves the piece perfectly, and David Robinson's costume designs could scarcely be improved.

Where audiences will find themselves most surprised, though, is when they realize that they are watching something that fairly defies comparison.

PATRONS ARE going to have to appraise the work for its own worth. It is not something they have seen over and over again, and it is not a chestnut that turns up repeatedly in unexpected places.

The play is a murder mystery with comic overtones that divide emphasis about equally. The title is derived from the significance of an imported sun

house purchased by a couple involved in blackmail.

They are the targets. In a sense they are also the victims, and it is how they manage to turn the tables that makes the comedy work. To tell more would be a disservice.

HANDSOMELY heading the cast is Marcus Smythe, returning from his professional career for the first time in six years to appear as guest star where he learned his craft.

Smythe portrays a wealthy writer of murder-mystery scripts for television. It is when he engages in what he thinks is an innocent affair that he finds himself framed by a blackmailing ring. The only way out is murder. He murders the wrong man. Or does he?

Matching Smythe line for line is Nancy Shelton as his wife. The wife has a career of her own as an actress in soap operas, and it is she who buys the gazebo — much against her husband's wishes even though it turns out to his ultimate advantage. In the beginning he doesn't know that she is the real target of the blackmailers.

PROVIDING support of star status is Byron Hays as friend and neighbor who just happens to be assistant district attorney. He helps the writer with a hypothetical case, never dreaming how close he is to real nerve ends.

Bouncing in and out effectively as a real estate agent is Anne Kanengeiser, adept at playing both ends against the

middle. The wife wants to sell. The husband doesn't. The agent knows it. Her comment about the gazebo strikes sparks.

Perhaps the pivot of the plot is provided by Tom Downard as the contractor who is to erect the gazebo.

ROUNDING OUT the supporting cast are Lisa Durham as the maid and Jeffrey Dill and David Butterfield as the murdered blackmailer's accomplices.

Kent Blocher appears briefly as a homicide detective, and his entourage includes Mark Eichorn, Richie Mahoney and Carlton Ritenour. Perhaps predictably they need more seasoning to learn how to slow down and avoid forcing.

They can work on that with first-night jitters behind them.

The play continues at 8:30 p.m. through Saturday and at 2 p.m. Sunday in Campus Center.

'Gazebo' nostalgic

Public Opinion 6/24/73

By Sarah Skaates

The Otterbein Summer Theater got off to a lively start last week with the nostalgic comedy mystery, "The Gazebo." Nostalgic because the language is clean and even murder is done with a gentle instead of a gruesome touch!

A gazebo, of course, is one of those picturesque bits of architectural gingerbread sometimes known as a summerhouse. In the course of the play, the acquisition of such a gazebo by Elliot and Nell Nash serves as a convenient pivot for turnings of the plot. Elliot is a writer of TV plays. His wife an actress, and their next-door detective neighbor proves a handy resource for Elliot's mystery plays. Add a black-mailer and the purchase of the gazebo, and you have the stuff of which this week's pleasure is made.

Guest actor Marcus Smythe is a welcome addition to the Otterbein Summer Theater company. A 1972 graduate of Otterbein, Smythe's professional experience since then has given further definition to his acting capabilities. As Elliot Nash, he is by turns charming, poised and frantic.

Nancy Shelton, fresh from her role as the actress star of "Applause," picks up easily as a different kind of actress in "The Gazebo." At times her characterization

seems a trifle forced, but basically she's comfortable as Nell Nash. OST newcomer Byron Hays was effective and convincing as the next-door detective.

The combination of Charles Dodrill's know-how as a director, Marcus Smythe's appealing grasp of the central character, and the well scripted elements of silliness and surprise make for a season opener with genuine entertainment appeal.

Smythe to star in 'Gazebo'

P.O. 6115

Professional actor and Otterbein College Theater graduate Marcus Smythe has been named professional star for Otterbein Summer Theater's opening production of "The Gazebo," slated for June 21 through June 24

at 8:30 p.m. and June 25 at 2 p.m. in the air-conditioned arena theater of the Campus Center.

Smythe, a 1972 Otterbein graduate, has established himself as a successful and sought-after actor in off-Broadway and regional professional theater, as well as television.

Smythe's career since leaving Otterbein has taken him to Equity Library Theater and National Arts Theater in New York City, ACT-Seattle, Studio Arena Theater in Buffalo, N.Y., the Cleveland Play House, and Beef and Boards dinner theaters, among others.

He has played such roles as Happy in "Death of a Salesman" (with Pat Hingle), Roderigo in "Othello" (with Brock Peters), Antonio in "Twelfth Night" (with George Grizzard), Mercutio in "Romeo and Juliet," Algeron in "The Importance of Being Earnest," and Pilate in "Jesus Christ Superstar."

Television appearances have included a co-starring role in "Rosetti and Ryan," and guest appearances in "Eight Is Enough," "Joe and Valerie," "Operation Petti-

coat," "Search for Tomorrow," and "Love of Life."

"We look forward to having a fine professional of Marcus' abilities join us for the opening of our 12th annual summer season," stated Charles Dodrill, director of theater at Otterbein.

"We are confident that his work in "The Gazebo" will set the pace for a delightful summer season."

"The Gazebo," a Broadway hit comedy-melodrama, has a story which revolves around a writer of TV mysteries always looking for a new twist. Comedy is the inevitable result when he is forced to protect his beautiful wife from a blackmailer. A gazebo suddenly gets a "new use" during installation and the "new twist" becomes very real.

Individual show and season tickets are on sale at the Otterbein Summer Theater box office in the Campus Center. Box office hours are from 12:30 p.m. until 9 p.m. weekdays.



Marcus Smythe