

Action, comedy abound in unusual 'Androcles'

By Nancy Gilson

Dispatch Entertainment Reporter

Children probably don't know or care that Otterbein College's *Androcles and the Lion* is commedia dell'arte.

They just appreciate being drawn into an action-filled show that offers a roaring lion, bright costumes, ridiculous villains and several opportunities to yell their heads off.

The Otterbein company and director Christina Kirk have worked hard to position this popular children's musical, which opens with public performances tonight, in the old Italian-theater style. Several characters are masked.

A mostly silent chorus of six engages in mime and acrobatics. Young lovers are thwarted by their elders. Exaggerated humor is ever-present.

The show is meticulously performed, with every tumble, comic aside or trumpet blast precisely timed and executed. The production can't help but feel a bit stilted, but its color and fluency make up for lack of spontaneity.

The story is an expanded account of the Aesop fable, in which a lowly slave plucks a thorn from a lion's paw and is later befriended by the lion. The rhyming script adds a pair of lovers, played with foppish flair by Corey Brill and Heather Lynn McClellan; a captain of braggadocio (Christopher DePaola) and the miserly uncle, Pantalone (Ben Sprunger), who refuses to part with his niece — or her dowry.

Chorus members move action along, serving as trees or walls where necessary, and echoing and commenting on the action with rubbery faces and body language.

Andrew Hansen is a vivacious, long-suffering Androcles, eager for freedom (and a good supper) but

THEATER REVIEW

Androcles and the Lion, Otterbein College Theatre's production of Aurand Harris and Glenn Mack's musical. Directed by Christina Kirk.

Androcles Andrew Hansen
Lion John Manicz
Pantalone Ben Sprunger
Captain Christopher DePaola
Isabella Heather Lynn McClellan

Carefully crafted comedy.

Performances are at 7:30 tonight; 10:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. Saturday and 1:30 p.m. Sunday in Cowan Hall, 30 S. Grove St., Westerville.

Tickets cost \$5.50 for reserved seats, \$4.50 for general admission. Call 823-1109 weekday afternoons.

willing to help the self-absorbed lovers.

Hansen has a strong show voice which, unfortunately, he only gets to use occasionally. Songs are weak and small in number. The Otterbein production is accompanied only by piano, continuing that feeling of thinness.

John Manicz, completely covered by his furry gold costume and three-dimensional mask, makes a tall and boisterous lion.

Rob Johnson's set is a visual treat, with raked stage, wooden scaffolding, and banners and drops changed by the actors. The actors are so comfortable with the set that they tumble and charge over it as if they were playing in a gym.

Eventually, the stage isn't enough. They enter and exit by charging down the aisles of Cowan Hall Theatre, while children in the audience shout encouragement.

Commedia dell'what?