

Whodunit? Otterbein Did Despite Verbose Scriptwriting

By Bob Powers
Of The Dispatch Staff

An intricate, amusing jaunt into the peculiar world of Agatha Christie is this week's offering of Otterbein Summer Theater.

The English writer, probably the most successful practitioner of the genre in the 20th century, penned a long string of novels and short stories which captured the fancy of millions.

A *Murder Is Announced*, adapted for the stage by Leslie Darbon, is rather typical Christie: an involved and occasionally amusing plot; a fairly large cast of characters (nearly all of whom have the finger of guilt pointed at them during the plot's unraveling); and the detective work of a professional and an amateur whose linking finally provides the solution to the crimes.

THE CENTRAL character is the elderly spinster, Miss Marple, whose keen mind and suspicious nature helped her through a series of Christie inventions. In *A Murder Is Announced*, she combines with the straightforward Inspector Craddock to get to the bottom of the goings-on in the mythical English village of Chipping Cleghorn.

The play suffers from the author's inability to create anything more than cardboard characters and from some

plot manipulations which verge on the unfair for those in the audience bent on finding the killer.

Otterbein's production is generally quite good, although director Fred Thayer could have pushed the show a bit more toward comedy. The play gets rather plodding at times, as the machinations of the story require too much talk and exposition. It makes for some rather arid stretches, although Thayer keeps his cast animated and on the move in an attempt to disguise the script's verbosity.

CHERYL NEWCOMB plays Miss Marple with an appealing freshness. She firmly resists the natural temptation to offer a Margaret Rutherford imitation (the late Miss Rutherford starred in a successful film series as Miss Marple).

John Ebner is a shade too normal as Inspector Craddock. Ebner can be hilarious doing broad comedy, and some punching up of this role would have helped.



Tamyan Sager is practically perfect as Letitia Blacklock, whose home is the scene of all the goings-on. Miss Sager displays a depth and maturity far beyond the role as written.

Susan Diol gloriously camps it up as Mitzi, the maid who remains in a state of nervous collapse. Miss Diol's eastern

European accent is consistent and funny.

LINDA FINNELL creates a warm and delightful Dora Bunner, bringing to life a dotty but dangerous personality. Richard Buckley has very little to do, but he does it extremely well.

Gwen Torry, Larry Sherwood, Ann Doering, Janine Papin and Michael Echols all contribute workmanlike portrayals.

The set by David Hammond and costumes by Kathleen Lewicki are excellent.

The audience gets a chance to par-

ticipate by guessing the identity of the killer during intermission. A drawing is made from correct entries at the end of the show, with tickets awarded to next week's production of *All Over Town*.

A Murder Is Announced continues at 8:30 p.m. through Saturday.

7-24-80 P.O.

'Murder' is perfect summer fare

By Sarah Skaates

Agatha Christie fans and those who relish whodunits in general will find this week's Otterbein Summer Theatre production made to their order. "A Murder Is Announced" is given respectfully affectionate treatment by Director Fred Thayer and the OST company.

Obviously there is murder involved, but being the thoroughly English piece that it is, there is nothing gruesome or dreadful about it. The point of a Christie mystery is not the violence or high powered emotions which might dominate a different sort of play.

Instead, the focus is on the element of mystery, the ravelling out of the puzzle thread by thread until at last the secret is revealed.

The OST production plays it perfectly straight very consistently. It might be tempting to approach the script with tongue in cheek, but Christie's characters are best brought to life with total sincerity. In this regard, Linda Finnell gets top billing for her treatment of the endearingly flaky family friend, Miss Bunner.

Tamyan Sager carries off the central role of Letitia Blacklock with gracious poise and conviction.

Cheryl Newcomb is perfectly dowdy as Miss Marple, the self-styled sleuth who fits all the pieces of the puzzle together without losing either her self-possession or the esteem of Inspector Craddock, played by John Ebner.

A murder mystery would be no fun if there weren't an assortment of likely suspects. Gwen Torry, Larry Sherwood and Ann Doering as resident guests at Miss Blacklock's home, plus Janine Papin and Richard Buckley as neighbors, are each given suspicious scrutiny in turn, and all have something secretive or sneaky about them to warrant such suspicion.

Susan Diol as the passionately paranoid cook throws herself into her role with almost excessive vigor, but her energetic approach is balanced well against the cool control of the other characters.

Michael Echols as the police sergeant and Jeffrey Garber as Rudi Scherz round out the cast.

tumes needed a stitch or two before Tuesday's opening, but the important ingredients for success were put together in good order.

David Hammond's set is handsomely Victorian and adds to the flavor of the piece.

"A Murder Is Announced" is perfect summer theater fare, and the Otterbein company serves it up very capably indeed. Enjoy this week's sample!

Monday night's rehearsal had its share of tongue-tangled lines, and a few of Kathleen Lewicki's cos-