

Howell Child's Play-competent effort

Review by Paul Baker

Child's Play, which opened Friday and runs through next Saturday at Howell Theatre, proves to be a competent effort at a competent script.

The play takes place in a Catholic boys' school and centers primarily around two middle-aged teachers and unexplainable outbursts of violence from the students.

The two faculty members, Dobbs and Malley, are portrayed superbly by Orlan Larson and Dana Mills, with laurels going to Larson. He is a very consistent actor whose nuances of characterization keep Dobbs real and alive every moment.

The scenes between these two are the best in the play, full of fire and energy — well worth seeing.

Another fine performance is turned in by Donovan Diez as the cynical Father Penny. Diez displays fine comic technique and proves an excellent balance to the other performers. George Hanson, as sports instructor Paul Reese, begins slowly and one is tempted to tune him out, but he grows with the production and by the end is much more believable.

The weakest performances are given by John Kasel as Father Griffin and James Waechter as Father Mozian. Their acting comes across stilted and sometimes slows the show.

The set design, by Nancy Myers, is very well conceived and executed, adding a great deal to the production and communicating in a very real way the dark atmosphere of the school.

Complements also go to director Hal Ford for his execution of a script that appears to be the major drawback of the production. The playwright, Robert Marasco, seems to be torn between writing two plays — one a thrilling mystery built around strange violence in a boy's school, the other a stirring tragedy about two aging teachers, whose entire lives are based upon respect and love of their boys. These two plays never quite resolve themselves to satisfaction.

Child's Play runs without an intermission and fortunately does not suffer for it. It is a production well worth seeing (especially for Larson and Mills) and is guaranteed to provide an exciting evening of theater.

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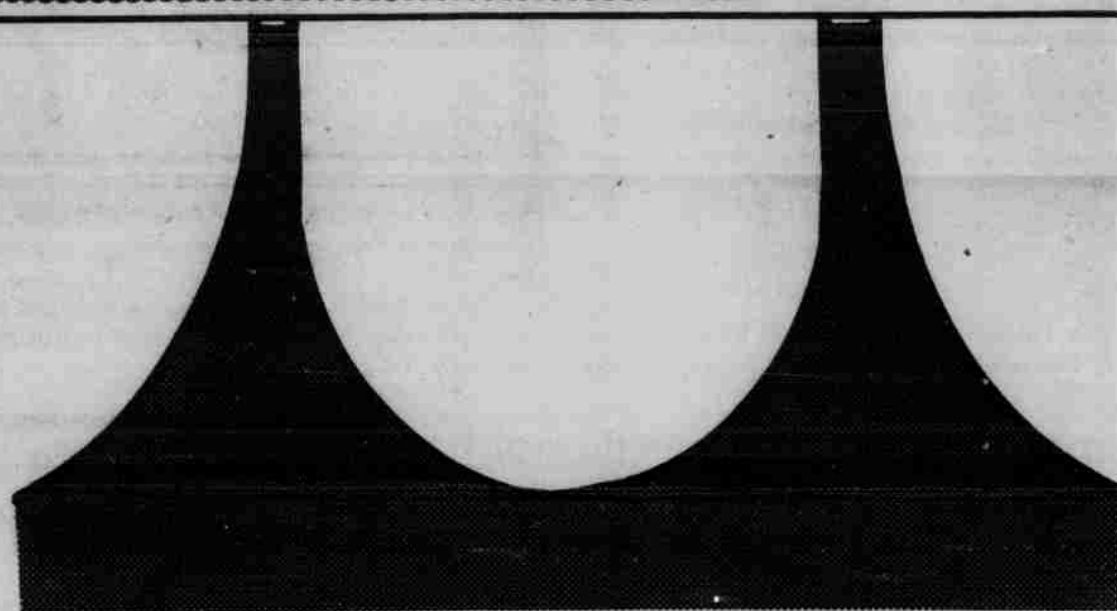
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