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Play Review

Actors shine in 'Our Town'

By **Stacey Laskin** | Indiana Daily Student | Monday, February 27, 2006

A boy threw up on the stairs of the school bus on my fourth-grade field trip to see "Our Town" at Indianapolis Civic Theatre. I remember the teachers didn't want the rest of us walking over his pile of vomit, so they opened up the emergency exits on the bus and made us all crawl out into the streets. To this day, that is all I remember about the play.

ENLARGE IMAGE



Actors rehearse a scene from "Our Town" Wednesday night in the Musical Arts Center. The musical opened to the public this past weekend and will continue with shows starting at 8 p.m. on Friday and Saturday.

But after watching the world premiere of Ned Rorem's opera, "Our Town," Friday night at the Musical Arts Center, I realized it's perfectly OK if that's all I remember. Because those little moments in our lives, "ticking clocks and shoes and socks," according to J.D. McClatchy's libretto, are the most important parts of life.

Not many students sat in the auditorium opening night, though that seems largely fitting with the original play's themes: love, marriage, death and the general progression of small-town life -- to which most of us might seem unexplored territory.

As a fourth grader, I wasn't able to appreciate the little moments in protagonists George Gibbs' and Emily Webb's lives because I had never fallen in love or battled with adulthood. Now, I'm able to understand with authority their shy romance. However, in Act II, the two married, and I tuned out. Marriage is still another world for me, some speck bobbing black on the horizon; I've never been there, and I don't know the way.

Mrs. Soames, played by mezzo-soprano Jamie Barton, a busybody in the play, sang imploringly to the audience, "Don't you just love a good wedding?"

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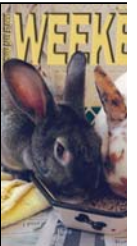
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I thought, "no, not really." I will have to see this play or opera again in 20 or so years to understand that scene, or maybe I never will.

But that's not the point.

More students should be attending this opera, which will have additional performances at 8 p.m. this Friday and Saturday. Thornton Wilder's original message is still intact: Make every moment count. Rorem's score drove McClatchy's libretto straight through the heart of Grover's Corner (the fictional town of the production).

The orchestra was a character itself, offering up discordant chords of disapproval during the funeral scenes and breathless flutters during the plot's happier moments. The musicians played fantastically; I almost wish I could have watched while they strung bows and hummed reeds in all the right places.

A projection screen functions as the background, flashing black and white farm houses, storm clouds and stars.

The real stars of this opera were the cast, filling out the script with beautiful singing and precise character development.

Vincent Liotta, "Our Town's" director, said in rehearsal he was focusing on small details about each character.

Emily (Anna Steenerson) and George (Marc Schapman) developed a dutiful chemistry on-stage as they matured. Cody Fosnick, who plays George on alternate nights, said Liotta told him this would be one of the most difficult roles he will ever play in his life because he plays George at 13 years old, 16 years old and as an older, married man.

Schapman did an excellent job of playing George at different ages, and Steenerson's gentle attention and soulful soprano arias made the couple believable.

The third act was brilliant. I cried, my boyfriend teared up and I think I heard the two men sitting behind us sniffing. I was sitting in the MAC thinking about all the things I wanted to do on this earth before I leave it: go back to Europe and stay sober most of the time, publish a pile of words with my name on top like a cherry, fall in love and stay there.

A century after the original plot takes place, people are still rushing through each day to get to the next.

"They never really look at each other," Emily moans when she revisits her familial life after her death. "They don't get it, do they?"

For ticket information on this weekend's performance of "Our Town," visit www.music.indiana.edu/publicity/opera/2005-2006season/index.html.

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