Worthwhile high points

One-acts fall below expectations

By BEVERLY WEHKING

Last weekend the Rice Players, with their triple-play show, “S.O.S.,” proved that even when they are bad, they still provide an entertaining evening.

Roberta Reed easily ran off with the honors as best actress of the evening, with her beautiful performance in the title role of Strindberg’s “Miss Julie.” Unfortunately she was hampered by some of Strindberg’s trite lines and didactic harangues, as well as by the necessity of playing to performances considerably below her.

Masterpiece

She rose to the challenge and was best in the most demanding scenes, particularly the hysterical scene with Kristin, which was a technical and emotional masterpiece. The one thing lacking from her characterization was the air of nobility and imperiousness which she and the servants insisted she possessed.

Jean, played by Pete Hempel, tried hard and was adequate, but his stereotyped gestures and inappropriate voice betrayed his inexperience. He almost became Jean in the most challenging scenes.

Unconvincing

Connie Brown’s Kristin was dull in the first scenes but much better late in the play, although she, too, was not a convincing character.

In general, the play was enjoyable except for Strindberg’s homilies. Director Fred Roberts showed his experience in using a skillful actress to greatest advantage and eliciting the best from less gifted performers. One did wish the peasants had been more numerous and rowdier.

The O’Neill play, “Where the Cross is Made,” is a perfect example of a bad play by a respected playwright. It was poorly chosen and not much better rendered. Bob B. Stout, as Nat Bartlett, had a decent pat style but showed no understanding of his character. His unchanging intense pitch was appropriate in the emotional scenes but jarring in the low-pitched dialogue.

Carol Loanne Fisher played the part of Nat’s sister Sue in an irritatingly high-pitched voice. The impression was one of a child trying to play an adult or an adult very skillfully playing a child.

Bob L. Stout as the captain was unquestionably best in his small role. Ed McGuckin played the doctor. New director Drew Meyer, possibly hampered by someone else’s choice of play, was uninspired and, apparently, uninspiring.

Highlight

Director Bob Sculley, also previously unexperienced, provided the audience with a play that made the evening worthwhile. Working with the best overall cast and the best play, Schaffer’s “The Private Ear,” he produced a funny, touching, and memorable show.

Joe Caruthers, as the shy, aesthetic Tchaik, and Chris Gates, as the swinging Don Juan, Ter, fitted perfectly into their roles, using their lines, the stage, and each other to fullest advantage.

Pantomime

Denise Gelinase, as the girl, Doreen, was good enough to keep the show from dropping when it focussed on her, although she didn’t seem to know what to do with her body or, sometimes, her face. But she was in command of herself in the pantomime scene with Tchaik, which was beautifully timed to the love duet from “Madam Butterfly.” That scene brought out the best in both performers and was a tribute to the director’s skill.

The final scene belonged to Caruthers (and to the light and sound crews), and his masterful performance brought to the audience an understanding so complete that it was painful.