

Critic Can't Grouch About 'Kismet' -- 'A Wry Fairy Tale'

By LOUIS BELL

"Kismet" should have been disgusting—for such is what makes a critic's life tolerable; and the indications that it would so prove primed this reviewer for one of those ever-welcome excursions into bad entertainment. The outcome of the evening was, however, somewhat disastrous—the art of gouching suddenly failed me.

Wry Fairy Tale

In case you're not familiar with the show, "Kismet" is a rather wry fairy tale of the Arabian Nights vein set in old Baghdad. The sly and beguiling hero is a

professional poet, Haji, whose wretched rhymes and Merlinian mimes attain for him a very precarious Emirship (Caliph-Wazir-Emir-Poet, beggar and beast.)

Dreamy-Eyed Daughter

Utterly disregarding unity of action, as most of the better plays do (I feel duty bound to flak the classics), the plot is complicated by the love affair between the disguised Caliph and the dreamy-eyed daughter of Hajj and by the intrigues of a pseudo-sadistic Wazir and his nearly-nympho wife. These complications and connotations are all spiced with some fair tunes (the aphrodisiac song, for

one), sung by voices most often superior to the music.

4-Star Level

"Stranger in Paradise" wasn't very moving, but overexposure probably dimmed its subtler tints for me. The production number that put the show on the 4-star level was "Baubles, Bangles and Beads," whose smoothness of mo-

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tion and facility for blending visual and audio colors almost tempted the tear ducts. For rousing to an orgiastic pitch "Net Since Nineveh" tongue-in-checked it dazzlingly.

"The Olive Tree"

"The Olive Tree" was compelling in an altogether different way, with its moral parable and its shadow of much-needed quiet on a theretofore Cecil B. De-Millian stage (if you can imagine that late showman putting a love duct into the hands of a cast of thousands.) "Was I Wazir?" was bordering on the tedious and was

often splotchy, but it showed off Mr. Sam Haigler Henry at his very individual best. This relatively new addition to Houston theatrics is fast becoming the most versatile ham on the local stage. Look for him as Wazir and see what you think.

Deftly Delivered Jokes

Only one of the principals dissatisfied me, and I chose to antagonize him by omission only. To recall his performance here would only reinstate my grouch. The rest were excellent. Georgia Creighton's Lalume was emphatically over-sexed, and her easily-anticipated joke lines deftly delivered. Her singing was both in

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character and countenance teasing (the resemblance to Gypsy Rose Lee being unmitigated mastery.

4-Voice Fugue

Nancy Phillips is a joy to behold as the virginal, golden-voiced daughter. Her beautiful voice rings through an otherwise unintelligible four-voice fugue with plaintive serenity. Finally, Paul Camheil, as the grandiloquent beggar poet, Haji, makes another auspicious addition to his career with a remarkably well-modulated performance. His role is difficult for a host of reasons—characterization, long sweeping movements up and down stage, leaps on and off platforms, etc. His capabilities are seemingly numberless, his style bubbling over with finesse.

Exceptional

Staging, sets, lighting, choreography, direction—all is exceptional. The laughs are many, and only once does the fun-making get really too rough (watch for the red carpet scene.) The singing is delightful, the atmosphere—vibratory! Try to see this one. (Theater Inc., nightly except Monday.)