Players Fluctuate In One-Acts

BY JOE PARSONS

The Rice Players are a unique group. Attending a university with but the barest semblance of a Fine Arts Department, they are forced to find outlets for their theatrical talents in strictly spare-time work.

EVEN FOR the less-burdened Academs (and the Players are by no means all Academs) this means a great devotion to duty and more than a little hard work and time, which is at a premium.

This being the case, one might expect their efforts to lead to something less than "good theatre"—a play needs more than a few hours a week to turn into a good performance. To the Players' everlasting credit, they turn out an inordinate number of "good-theatre" performances. Their One-Act Play Workshop this last weekend, or at least part of it, was a good example.

THE EVENING started out rather inauspiciously. The first offering, a serious piece entitled "Strange Road" by John Houston, just didn't have it. Acting, to say the least, was uninspired. Only one of the characters, Mrs. Kadan played by Honey Moore, had any stage presence at all. The others looked as if they had just stepped in off the streets and were very uncomfortable where they were.

The second item on the agenda was a play by Dr. Taylor. This one held together a little more than the first, but was still disappointing. The play, for one thing, was inscrutable: named "Father of Lies" (and apparently from a full-length play entitled "The Cripples") it dealt with an alchemist, his greedy assistant, and a lady if ill repute possessed of the devil. It was cute, but . . .

"Hello Out There," by William Saroyan, dealt with a man in jail for rape and his meeting with a young girl who was the jail's cook. Their sudden love was portrayed touchingly and with finesse: Hazleton turned out a good performance, and Miss Walsh was nothing less than excellent. The action proceeded smoothly, and in general was very, very satisfying.

This was a feather in the cap of Chuck Yingling, his second directorial effort of the night.

Nothing but a risque, rollicking farce (with perhaps tones of social criticism), "Don't Run Around in the Nude" was played to the hilt. Outstanding was Michael Cox as a member of the French Chamber of Deputies; the rest of the cast, notably Ginny Sturgis as his wife, ran very close. Direction under Phyllis Moore and Mike Holmes was good: the play had the rapid lines and well-delivered punch-lines so necessary to a good farce. In all it was the best offering of the evening.

TECHNICALLY, it was still better, but not good. The lighting, though splotchy and very hot, at least lit up the actor's visages; the set left something to be desired (for example: the rear wall looked like two well-used bed-sheets). This, however, did little to mar the fast action and effective comedy of the play.

So, the evening turned out to have elements of "good theatre" after all. The last two plays were worth the agony of the first two, and one came away feeling ever more in awe of the Rice Players. They're not perfect, understand—just very good.