Sights: down the wrong Alley

By STEVE THORPE
Thrasher Amusements Editor

When the staff of the Alley was planning their next season they dug deep into an old closet and discovered a skeleton wrapped in a moth-eaten army blanket. They made all sorts of noises expressing joy and jubilation (for reasons still unfathomable) and then decided to parade the old monstrosity in front of everybody as a work of art.

To delve into the psychology behind the ridiculous production of "A Sound of Hunting" at the Alley would more than likely fill several volumes with trivia, but suffice it to say that, at least, the play is nothing more than a calculated error on the part of the Alley sentimentalists.

At its worst, the play is mal-directed, and mal-written.

First, the allegation of mal-direction. John Wylie has, it seems, lost all sense of arena staging in his blocking of "The Sound of Hunting" — if you go (and I don't recommend it) — but if you go, do not sit on the south side of the arena, for the play seems generally composed of actor's rear ends.

More importantly, Wylie has not succeeded in drawing any depth of character out of his actors.

Now, to the mal-acting. Colorlessness has already been worked over above, but when a show completely falls dead in one scene, you could say that there was a complete lack of energy as well. Perhaps John Wylie is too wrapped up in his job as director to play a part well, so that might be his excuse, but somehow Jerry Hardin doesn't have that excuse.

The scene of the confrontation between Hardin and Wylie should be chock-full of tension and hope, etc., etc. It isn't. Likewise Philip Fisher should have little trouble with diction on a set that is never more than fifty feet from the farthest point in the audience — he does. You cannot even hear him.

And now, worst of all these sins, perhaps; the play is no damn good as a play. If you can imagine a watered down version of "Combat" with no actual shooting on stage and full to over-brimming with such clichés as "I don't like it, it's too quiet out there." Then this is "The Sound of Hunting."

Sounds

By CHESTER ROSSON
Thrasher Music Editor

The concert by the Houston Symphony Monday evening should have been nothing less than great. The all-Sibelius evening commemorating the composer's centennial featured his Violin Concerto and the Symphony No. 5, excellent representative selections. Many critics consider Barbirolli's recording of the Fifth Symphony with his Halle Orchestra the best available. The soloist, the fabled Zino Francescatti, hadn't broken any bones, unlike other recent soloists, and actually did appear to play the difficult Concerto in D Minor.

In the opening "Pohjola's Daughter," the strings brought out one of the qualities that makes the concert hall performance so superior to even the best recording of a familiar work. No stereo equipment can capture the rasping attacks or sheer visual excitement of agitated strings.

Poor Tuning

The following concerto revealed one of the disadvantages of the concert versus the recorded performance. Even the greatest of artists runs into physical difficulties with his instrument, Zino being no exception. During the entire first movement "Zino" unfortunately had trouble keeping his violin tuned — a fact which marred an otherwise dazzling performance. Mr. Francescatti's famed polish and precision came through, however, in the final two movements.

The feeling that the final result of the evening was something less than superlative developed only after the intermission, during the orchestra's version of the Fifth Symphony. And I do mean the orchestra's, since Sir John just didn't seem to be in control. For the most part it played with a lethargic unresponsiveness strange even to the Houston orchestra.

Exhausted Director

The strings were repeatedly muddy in tremolo passages, and the basses rattled annoyingly, again and again in one legthy fortissimo. Only occasionally could Sir John evoke the grand style for which he was begging. By the end of this very disappointing performance, Sir John was exhausted — probably at trying to impart some of his feeling to the recalcitrant orchestra.

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The Erick Hawkins Ballet presentation Monday evening, February 22, at 8:15 in Hamman Hall, should be required attendance. This well-known modern dance group is interesting not only to those who appreciate ballet, but also to those interested in avant garde music.