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Children Show L.T. Adults Age Not Acting Yardstick

By L. E. BURDICK

Taking precedent by the forelock, Little Theater of Jamestown has opened the portal of opportunity to juveniles to star in a major production and first night audiences Sunday and Monday gave rousing approval.

"Caddie Woodlawn," a story of Wisconsin in the 1860's, featuring the Woodlawn family's frontier experiences, introduced nine child actors from 5 to 15 and six adults.

Because the 18 children are double-cast to play on alternate nights, we attended the Sunday night dress rehearsal of the cast that will appear tonight. We were as impressed as the 150 Golden Agers, parents and friends who made up that audience. Some of the juveniles did so well that we left with the secret conviction the Monday night cast would be hard pressed to give as fine a show. Last night, before an audience of near

capacity, nine other juveniles showed us how wrong we could be. We would like to urge every member of Little Theater to see both casts. It was a rare experience. But of course this is impossible. Suffice be it to say that no matter which group of juveniles you see you will be mighty pleased.

The play is up to Little Theater standards, any way you look at it. The settings are beautiful, the props authentic, the costuming delightful. They say some L-T members had qualms about the acting ability of the kids. They need worry no longer. It just goes to show what juveniles can assimilate with proper training. Not a line was dropped, not a cue missed in two performances and the juveniles stayed in character like seasoned troupers.

So much attention was focused on the children, of course, that some in the audience might be

tempted to underestimate the fine performances by the adults.

Mrs. Ruby Bell, playing Mrs. Woodlawn, the mother, is making her initial stage bow, but you never would guess it. Her own daughter, Laraine Bell, plays the part of Hetty, 7-year-old "tattle-tale," in one of the casts.

Lillian Johnson as Katie Conroy, the hired girl with a broad Irish brogue, turns in a superlative and sympathetic role.

Mr. Woodlawn, the father, a transplanted Englishman who comes to love the frontier and turns down an English title to remain an American citizen, played by George Dawson, is a tower of strength among his brood. Carrying a heavy role in lines, as well as interpretation, his steady, even interpretation fits delightfully into the whole. But being a father of four in real life, he admits he See **LITTLE THEATER** Page 12

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gets a tremendous kick out of playing with his troupe of 18 onstage.

Mr. Tanner, the circuit rider, was capably played by Ralph Rhodes and Indian John by Vernon E. Johnson.

A delightful touch to the play is added by the finished work of Don John Ross as Robert Ireton, the Irish hired man who does a song and dance to accompany on his own banjo, in which the Woodlawn children take part enthusiastically. Mr. Ross, a local radio announcer, did such a fine characterization we should like to see him receive a larger role in a future performance.

And now for those delightful kids: To each and every one of you a great big orchid for showing your elders that community theater is just as much your apple as theirs. Yours was the opportunity to appear for the first time in fourteen seasons in a major Little Theater production and you blazed a trail straight from a Wisconsin wilderness into the hearts of us oldsters of Little Theater.

Taking the juvenile roles are: Nancy Hernan and Martha Bloomstrand as Clara (aged 15); Sharon Swanson and Laraine Bell as Hetty (aged 7); Mary Sweetin and Judy Murray as Minnie (aged 5); David Holmlund and Alaric R. Bailey Jr. as Tom (aged 13); Harold Smith and Richard Day as Warren (aged 9); Jo Warren and Susan Stone as Caddie (aged 11); June Ingleson and Deborah Doherty as Cousin Annabelle (aged 11); Sandra Rhodes and Carol Davis as Maggie Bunn (aged 10) and Douglas Rhodes and Ellis Day as Silas Bunn (aged 11).