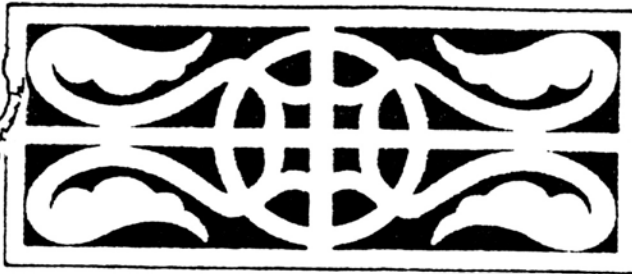


The Oddfellow Players



East Hampton, New York

NEWSDAY, FRIDAY, JUNE 26, 1992

T H E A T E R

REVIEWS

From Poetry to Fortune Cookies

BEHOLD AND REFLECT: A Celebration of Summer Solstice.

Conceived and directed by Maria Pessino. Poetry by Paddy Noble, Jamie Lerner, Jill Bart, Diana Chang, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Georgette Preston and others. Featuring S. M. Bennett, Nyssa Eva Dickman Frank, Francisco Sainz, Diane Grotke, Frances Alenikoff, Janice Bishop, Nancy Mulinelli and others. Music composed by Steven Dickman. Set design, painting and sculpture by Ellen Frank and performance painting by Gabriele Tanzel Raacke. At Oddfellows Playhouse, 26 Newtown Lane, East Hampton. Performances tonight and tomorrow night and July 1-4. Seen opening night Wednesday.

By Steve Parks

STAFF WRITER

HOW FITTING that the Oddfellow Players should have to blot out the sun in this celebration of the summer solstice. These being some of the longest days of the year, the sun doesn't set until halfway through the brief but boisterous performance of "Behold and Reflect." So the company has thoughtfully blacked out the windows upstairs at the Oddfellows Playhouse.

Maria Pessino has created a series of tableaux — 21 in all — in which a panoply of artists and art forms collaborate to create a living canvas reflecting light and dark. This stylized hybrid of theater, poetry, dance, music, sculpture and painting is a provocative experience for those who are willing to suspend conventional assumptions about what a performance should be.

There is a stage but the performers rarely appear on it. The actors speak but rarely to each other. The performance is meant to surround the audience literally, yes, but more important, it is intended to be absorbed as a kind of performance environment.

Only the poetry is conventional. Most of it's in rhyming verse. At times the effect is positively Shakespearean. "Behold and Reflect," with its fuzzy demarcation between the supernatural and the mundane, reminded

me a bit of the Bard's comedies, especially "A Midsummer's Night Dream" or "As You Like It" — all sound and fury, signifying, well — something.

Most effective was "Dragon, Man and Witch," a dance choreographed by Frances Alenikoff who is also the bottom half of the dragon. The dragon's head, hidden behind an African-style mask, belongs to 7-year-old Nyssa Eva Dickman Frank who rides on Alenikoff's shoulders. S.M. Bennett is the primitive, loinclothed man, endowed fittingly for this part with a hairy chest. Diane Grotke as the witch looks rather more like a gypsy in her bright garb. Together they dance to the percussive, atonal music of Steven Dickman.

Other tableaux are straightforward, as Maria Pessino, wearing a slip, languidly recites from Joyce's "Ulysses" the sexually charged passage known as "Yes": "I asked him with my eyes to ask me again. Yes."

"I Am Girl" is oddly appealing, with Nyssa, who resembles the Shirley Temple of about 50 years ago, seated on Diane Grotke's lap. Only we don't see the woman behind the girl. We hear the woman's voice as Nyssa lipsyncs the words, and we see the woman's arms gesturing instead of the child's.

Ellen Frank's "Tree Sculpture," a floor-to-ceiling copper coil with random branches and metallic leaves seems under-utilized. It's the centerpiece of this strange set. After the third tableau, Gabriele Tanzel Raacke begins a performance painting in the back of the room. On opening night, it was a watercolor of a woman. During one of the tableaux, a witch circulates, handing out fortune cookies to the audience. Mine read: "The closer the light, the fiercer the demon."

"Behold and Reflect" is an experiment worth trying. Just don't spend too much time trying to figure out what it means. The show is over before you know it, running barely an hour.

By the way, I think those fortunes were rigged.

THE LONG ISLAND NEWSPAPER

Newsday

