

Drama, humor shape SR hit 'The Miracle Worker'

What happens during a stage production can be almost as interesting as some on stage incidents; such is the case with Stage Right's "The Miracle Worker." The drama is playing its last weekend at downtown Conroe's Crighton Theatre.

The production, with three performances remaining, delineates the familiar story of blind and deaf Helen Keller, her teacher, and family, while drawing radiant reviews from audiences.

"Some of our patrons have told us it's our finest production to date," said Carolyn Corsano Wong, a SR founder. "Some said they were reluctant to come see it because of the subject matter, but afterwards they realize there is humor in it, too. Audiences leave the theatre inspired, uplifted, and even with tears in their eyes."

A real life mother-daughter team, Monica Munson, who plays Viney, the Keller family maid, and her daughter, Isabella Munson, who depicts servant girl, Pearl, engenders some humor. More laughs come through the wry one-liners that Gar-



PEGGIE MILLER

Performing Arts Columnist

ret Wilson delivers. A member of SR's youth theatre, Bravo Company, Wilson portrays Helen Keller's half-brother, James, the most detached member of the Keller family.

The two little girls, Lena Torluemke and Lauren Santana, who alternate the role of Helen Keller, so artfully play the deaf and blind girl that some attendees approach them after a performance, thinking they really are physically limited. The girls' mothers, Jennifer Torluemke and Karen Santana, work behind the scenes. Both show up at every performance, no matter whose daughter appears as Helen. They cook the food that is used in stage scenes, as well, and assisted with set needs from the beginning.

Wong works in the sound booth for this production, and says that remarks she overhears often are delightfully revealing.

"One night before the show," she recounts, "a little boy came into the balcony, looked out at the stage, and asked his mother 'Will they be alive?'"

When his mother confirmed that yes, they would be alive, and not on video, the little boy's eyes widened. "How do they do that?" he wondered.

"It's not easy," Wong concurred, "but to tell such a beautiful story is worth the effort."

Harley Wong, Carolyn's family canine, may have starred in more shows that some Hollywood stars, and with equal stage presence.

However, not many stars clean up the stage after their curtain calls, like Harley does.

"There are scenes of food fights between Helen and teacher Annie Sullivan during the show, as Annie tries to 'civilize' the unruly child," Carolyn said. "Harley goes out, takes his bows, and then

heads under the dining table on stage to clean up." One of her happy concerns during rehearsals has been that cast members feed Harley so much backstage that sometimes he is reluctant to take his cues.

Audiences love it when at one point the blind Helen begins signing into Harley's paw. This begets laughter from the crowd, but Harley, taking it all in stride, just gazes back with a "Do you know what she's doing?" expression.

Other actors that perform their roles to the hilt are Katt Gilcrease and Beverly Watkins portraying Helen's parents. They display stage chemistry in the roles of the blustery, resigned father, and the gentle, hopeful mother. Katie Kelly depicts Aunt Ev, and created all the costumes, while her spouse, Peter Kelly, works the light booth. Layci Jones plays Helen's teacher, Annie Sullivan, with grit and humor, all under direction of Reena DeSanto.

"The Miracle Worker" is at the Crighton Theatre, 234 N. Main, tonight and Satur-

day at 8, with its final performance at 2 p.m. Sunday. Teachers pay \$10 each; students pay \$5 for this production. Regular admission is \$17; some discounts apply. Call (936) 441-7469 to reserve.

Stage Right's Christmas show is "My Three Angels." Although it already is cast, one major actor had to cancel because of a change in his work schedule. Carolyn Corsano Wong, who directs this heartwarming comedy, said she is looking for a young man between ages 18-24 to take the role of Paul, love interest in "My Three Angels."

"It's a terrific part," she said, "where the audience starts thinking he is weak and manipulated, but as it turns out, he's just as bad as the 'villain.'" Please contact her at carolyn.wong@stageright.org if interested in the role of Paul.

"My Three Angels" runs weekends Nov. 30 through Dec. 16, with rehearsals soon underway.

According to Gayle Lamina, Montgomery County Performing Arts Society

board member, a special event is planned Sunday, Sept. 23, in the home of Carl and Lyn Howard. It's honoring members of STARS, a MCPAS support group that Gayle founded.

Introduced at the Mimosas in May luncheon in Walden Yacht Club, STARS currently claims 40 members who will be invited to functions just for them, such as the party MCPAS President Mary Smith, and spouse Ken Smith, hosted in July. Membership is open at an annual fee of \$30, and all interested in joining are invited to the Sunday affair, set between 4-6 p.m.

Guest speaker for this party is Michael Burke, executive director of Texans for the Arts in Houston. Brenda Cooper is STARS liaison to the MCPAS board.

Please call (936) 760-2787 for more information about STARS or the Sunday event.

Peggie Miller may be reached with people and performing arts news at pegmiller@juno.com or call her at 936-448-6455.