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"THE OLDEST IN DES MOINES"

Backstage At The Theater Workshop

by Frances Bosnak

The novice starts at the names of these and many other great writers as she looks up and around the Iowa State College Theater Workshop that was once a pavilion for animal judging. Its uniqueness is startling.

From the clever symbols of the Iowa State College Players over the inside of the door, to the elaborate chandelier, both designed by Prof. Maurice Hanson of the Department of Landscape Architecture, it's different. There is the gilded Indian border around the stage and the simple but never tiring fleur-de-lis on the back wall of the ticket office.

Most any afternoon a radio can be heard in some remote corner of the Theater Workshop while costumed characters stroll in front of the stage footlights, getting in character. And almost anyone can get in character from actor to make-up man with only two requisites—initiative and willingness to work.

An incessant hammering on one side of the stage means that soon the maze of boards will become the wall of a room, the side of a house or perhaps all that will be called for this time will be a modernistic blank flat.

Remodeled Workshop

In the spring of 1948, Miss Harriet Adams of the Department of Applied Art and Prof. Hanson began their new project of remodeling the Workshop. Instead of dull grey walls and a colorless atmosphere for the audience, they put their ideas together and brought out the natural beauty of the theater.

The circular home of the Iowa State Players has only one post in the center of the room to support the roof. To conceal this vital necessity, the stage was placed to one side of it making its length about 12 feet. Another novelty about the Workshop is that the stage is on the floor while the audience is elevated to insure good visibility.

Seats—they're new one for your added comfort—are built all to one side of the stage and are set on a nine inch step-like stand progressing to the front wall. Six-footers needn't fear bumping their heads against the ceiling because enough room has been allotted.

A 13-foot washroom that stood toward the back of the Workshop was converted into two dressing rooms. The women don their costumes upstairs while the
men dress downstairs. Each room is about 6 feet high and contains the necessary facilities—such as a long dressing table, mirrors, sink and a clothes rack—for campus actors and actresses.

Make-up is applied in these rooms. Collected here are lipsticks, mascara, eyeshadow and grease paint galore. There are boxes of different colored false hair for sideburns and mustaches. It has already been decided just how much and what color make-up each character will require.

There aren't too many costumes on hand, so they are usually rented. Of course, there are alterations to be made and mending here and there, providing work for a textiles and clothing major.

On the other hand, there's work for an applied art major downstairs. It takes an eye for perspective and an artistic touch to do the sketching for the street scene that is being painted for a flat in the first act.

Gilded Chandelier

Coming through the stage and out toward the seats, you'll notice the elaborate new chandelier. Gilded heavy cords form a circle around the fixture and others, hanging loosely from the ceiling, give the loop effect. From these loops, the cords are tightly drawn in straight lines to all parts of the ceiling. The huge tassel centered in the middle of the chandelier, hangs softly, leaving the center of the fixture and the ceiling a mass of yellow sparkle. The cost was small because the gilded cords are heavy rope, and the dramatic tassel is just a mop.

Miss Adams and applied art students performed the professional work of designing and painting. The gold fleur-de-lis pattern can again be noticed on the back of the greyed burgundy door. The graceful border around the stage enhances the deep maroon velvet curtain and dark green walls.

As a border along the ceiling, the names of great writers dating from 5 B.C. to the present day are painted. A half drop creating a scalloped effect was painted beneath the names and has a long painted cord and tassel in the center. Between each of these scallops are the symbols of the theater—the faces of comedy and tragedy.

New Clown Design

Another eye catching part of the Workshop is the clown designed and made by Dycie Stough, applied art senior, and Christian Peterson of the Department of Applied Art. You'll notice the rakish angle of his head and the catching grin as he looks toward the stage and holds the mask of tragedy.

Left of the ticket box is the “Green Room.” Although it's used for rehearsals and meetings, soon there'll be a steaming cup of coffee waiting for you there during the intermission. The “Green Room” will be extended straight back to the other side of the circular wall to make more room.

The “No Smoking” rule still stands. But soon the audience will not have to leave the theatre through the front door to smoke. Instead, there'll be a door leading from the “Green Room” to a terrace which will reach from the back door to the front of the theater.

The Theater Workshop isn't completed—plans are now underway for new additions. To those of you who would like to act, paint, operate lights, or just plain work in the atmosphere of a theater, this is for you!

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