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'Ten Nights' Spoofs Temperance

By WALTER LAZENBY

CHARLESTON—To round out its tenth season and to contribute to Eastern's Diamond Jubilee celebration, the Charleston Community Theatre last night resurrected a play which originally intended, 116 years ago, to assert, nay prove, that "When you take a drink of straight alcohol, the chaser is evil."

In its present musical form, as adapted in 1968 by Fred Carmichael, "Ten Nights in a Barroom" does not preach anything. Instead, through the conventions of musical theatre and by means of stylized acting, it spoofs the propagandistic aims of the old play and of the temperance novel on which it was based and parodies nineteenth century melodramatic performances.

In addition, it captures the charm of a Gay Nineties son-and-dance revue.

For this production, its first musical since 1970, CCT has assembled its youngest and largest cast ever, along with an eight-member orchestra,

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and is using Eastern's Fine Arts Theatre. Performances will be repeated tonight and tomorrow night at 8 p.m.

No time need be wasted in discussing the play's almost impossible dialogue, its one-sided stock characters, its contrived happy ending, or its simplistic assumptions about good and evil. What makes the evening's fare palatable is its inclusion of favorite turn-of-the-century tunes and the acting of individual performers.

At times imitating Mae West's sinuous walk and deadpan talk, Kathy Gray,

always the center of attention when she is onstage, gives a flamboyant performance as Goldie Hills, the gal-with-a-heart-of-gold who entertains patrons of the Sickle and Sheaf Inn. Her rendition of "Frankie and Johnny" is an especially bright moment in the parade of her talents.

Terry Kell's recitative-like delivery of lines in the role of Joe Morgan, drunkard, seems in perfect accord with the style of the whole show, and his tenor voice is a treat in numbers like "When You Were Sweet Sixteen."

Anne Timblin, in her speaking and acting, effectively impersonates a child, Mary Morgan; and when she sings, her more mature-sounding voice is lovely. She deserves considerable credit, along with the director, for avoiding maudlin sentimentality in the deathbed scene.

One the youngest members of the cast, Greg Graening,

gives a trouper-like performance as Tommy, the shoe-shine boy, and sings "Meet Me in St. Louis" as an olio number. Dale Furry sings "Daisy Bell" using a real bicycle built for two.

The rest, without exception, seem well cast and perform with verve.

Director Gerald Sullivan, teaming up with wife Barbara as musical director, has incorporated into the production appropriate stage devices, tableaux, and parodistic business for his actors, drawing on his extensive knowledge of acting styles.

Happily, the orchestra, though strong, never overwhelms the singers, even for patrons sitting down front; but the tempo, for my taste, might be a little faster for some of the numbers. Phyllis Rogers has sewn up a rainbow of authentic-looking costumes, and the set and even the program recall the atmosphere of an earlier era.