

Opening Night At 'The Crucible' . . .

Smell Of Salem Jail Gets Help From Weak First Act

By Bill Campbell

The "prodigious stench" of the Salem jail in the second act of Arthur Miller's "Crucible" was not the only smelly aspect of Company '63's opening-night performance last Wednesday evening in the Fine Arts Theatre.

Thanks to weak performances in several supporting roles, much of the strength displayed by those with major parts was dissipated. Most of this substandard acting occurred in the first act with an excessive amount of sing-song nursery rhyme line reading—monotonous, melodic and deserving of accompaniment by wood block, tambourine and triangle.

Fortunately, Miller's tale of hysteria and hangings in 17th century Salem featured at least four examples of acting with a high-gloss professional polish. Although often painfully highlighting the inadequacies of some of their fellow players, Bill Ozier as John Proctor, Sally Golinveaux as Abigail Williams, Jim Wilhelm as Rev. Sam Parris and Dwight Ashby as Giles Corey showed complete familiarity with their respective roles and acted with precision and restraint.

Because Miller's theme extends to such 20th century situations as "McCarthyism" and right-wing extremism, "The Crucible" demands accurate and serious interpretation by the actors. The lack of this in the first act turned what should have been an absolutely dramatic first scene into a blubbering bathos which deserved inclusion in a short course on witch hunting.

However, at the opposite pole was the tense, revealing first scene of the second act in which Miss Golinveaux and Ozier gave performances that fulfilled the play's need for mature, intelligent acting.

Wednesday's presentation was also aided by the set—the main element in removing the historic veneer of the play's action and exposing the controversial theme. The stark contrast of black and white against a backdrop of blue or magenta light proved to be a correct vehicle for "suggestive realism."

In general, the performance was basically strong, but often afflicted with periods of weakness which even the best witch could not cure.