Intense Mood Makes ‘Bridge’ Splendid Readers’ Production

By Phyllis and Steve Gibbs

“The Bridge is Love!”

This was certainly the most vivid answer to the question-mark “search” which permeated the theme of the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, “The Bridge of San Luis Rey.”

ALTHOUGH it had some weaknesses, the Readers’ Theatre adaptation of the novel, under the direction of Raymond Schneider, proved an interesting and stimulating experience this past weekend.

As the curtain opened, the stage was in darkness except for a spotlight, illuminating the hands of a Spanish guitarist (Jim Magruder). After a brief interlude, the strumming halted and the problem of the play was presented. In the background, in a blue-green flash, one could see the broken bridge of San Luis Rey. This same flash technique was used symbolically throughout the performance as the narration of each life was ended. The effectiveness of this device highlighted the intense mood created during the reading.

AND THE BRIDGE is Love; but tragically so. Five people died to prove it. A Spanish friar (Jeff Hendricks) witnesses the tragedy when “the finest bridge in all Peru” collapses, hurling five travelers into the gulf below. He sees, in the event, a means to find the Divine reason for their sudden death.

The narration was divided into three segments: the first, which moved too slowly, recounted the life of the eccentric Marquesa; the second sequence, picked up the pace and revealed the lives of the inseparable brothers, Esteban and Manuel; the final segment related the lives of Uncle Pio and his protege Camila.

CERTAINLY the moving performance of Judy Mather as the Marquesa, made alive by a flurry of eccentric gestures, was a highlight of the production.

Jim Rinnert’s and Mike Drake’s portraits of Esteban and Manuel were no less moving in the depiction of their inseparable love.

Jim Miller’s role as Uncle Pio drooped in places, but was highlighted in the third scene when he confronted Camila after her performance.

Sara Golinveaux did a splendid job with the difficult role of Madre Maria. She became a realistic and very convincing directress of the Convent.

THE STRENGTH of effective set and costumes, the creation in intensities of mood, and depths of many of the character portrayals well overbalance the weaknesses in the narration, inconsistency of accents, and weaker characterizations in the story.