

# Psychological Teaser, Local Players Merit Community's Support

By K. C. Harvey  
Standard Drama Critic

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If there is weakness in the production structure, it is in the male casting; this is to be preferred, because "Bad Seed" is a play in which the female of the species is, indeed, deadlier than the male.

Outstanding performances are given by Netta Allen, the

child, Rhoda; and by her stage mother, Christine, played by Thea Willard.

Not only is Netta as natural as Rhoda, but her performance is remarkably well sustained. And she appears to be word-perfect, for I did not detect a single prompt throughout the four hours; she is on stage most of the while.

Thea Willard, as Christine, gives that kind of polished performance one expects of the professional actress, but is not entitled to expect from the non-professional.

Thea's previous experience with this drama group—The Garrison Players—was in their presentation of "Peer Gynt," when she attracted favourable notice for her small part in the madhouse scene. Also in this scene of "Peer Gynt" was Netta Allen.

"Monica Breedlove" is a down-to-earth character that is all too familiar in life's daily run; in this role, Bea Walsh does well: akin with her women colleagues of the cast, she sustains the part with utter clarity and conviction. The men did not come over so clearly.

Elaine Woolman's Miss Fern is schoolmarmish and rightly so. Prosaic and precise, it is a delightful cameo of the "Old Maid" partner of a private school.

Barbara Lawrence, actress, producer, whose work for the Players and for radio we know well and admire, has a part of the inebriate she manages to slur her alcohol-steeped speech without the loss of meaning—which is no mean feat, especially in a temporary theatre where extraneous sounds tend to obscure the flow of lines.

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Scmp - November 27, 1960

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The result is that the total effect lacks the size of even a miniature Greek theatre, and has not the intimacy of an Elizabethan apron stage where the actors are raised on a slight platform above the "groundlings". The greatest disadvantage is the noise from the arrivals off and on the ferries, taxis coming and going, harbour rovers, and happy conversationalists passing to and fro. Several tense moments were ruined by these interruptions.

Conventions Ignored  
So much for the physical handicaps, against which the players had to contend. The Producer decided to ignore the conventions of such stages and to offer a four-walled room as a set with one back wall; consequently the actors had to sit with their backs to some section of the audience, and is an emotional play of this sort words and facial expressions were too frequently obliterated.

"Bad Seed" by Maxwell Anderson is a tight introverted play and needed the most enclosed of "conventional" stages through which the audience could eavesdrop on what is a revolting tale, meaningless in the destruction of youth and intimate in the revelation of personal heredity.

The story revolves around a small girl, apparently prim, popular and well-behaved who casually commits murders to achieve her own childish ends. Her mother gradually becomes suspicious and probes to discover the psychological motive and whether her own heredity might be responsible. We are

treated to a variety of psycho-analysis on several themes in a superficial fashion.

The ending is not unexpected, mainly because last night the whole production moved far too slowly and the unnecessary realistic movements of taking an empty glass out of one door, returning and bringing a blanket out of another made a hard wait for the audience and a trial to the performer. The lengthy black-outs between scenes further reduced the tension.

But this production should be seen for beautiful performance by Thea Willard as the mother. She completely carried the play.

The character had to develop from that of a doting mother into one who began to suspect her only child of murder, and then was told the truth by this amoral murderer. Later she had to face the fact that her own mother was a murderer. This was a part that demanded great emotional capacity and power and Mrs Willard possessed both.

Never Over-acted  
She never over-acted as she might have been tempted to do, and alone of the cast seemed to understand the size and limitations of the stage. The scene with her child as she tries to draw out the truth, and the final climax were passionately played but finely disciplined.

Netta Allen was controlled as her daughter; and for a young child never fagged or relaxed. She managed to suggest her "split" character. Her best moment of evil was with the garbage-man—and Jerry Stryker gave good support.

Of the rest of the cast Bea Walsh as the neurotic affected friend was the liveliest. Fewer gestures (and more varied) and less moving around the stage would have made her more equal to Mrs Willard.

Bereaved Mother  
Barbara Lawrence as a bereaved mother, had two scenes of miserable drunkenness; the first was a little uncertain, but the second had pathos, and her words and movements were more characteristic.

The male member of the cast were "adequate" but did not always sound convinced of their words, and had made little attempt to absorb their parts.

The set was pleasant and neatly suggested the right sort of apartment. The lighting which must have been part of this experiment worked well after a hesitant start.

# At last, a theatre!

By John Luff

LAST night was a considerable experience in Hongkong, something achieved, something done, after fourteen years of solid talk. For here at last is a building, conceived, designed, and constructed as a theatre.

Your older dramatist could find a conclusion. Thus Marlowe with a wonderful line placed in the mouth of Faustus who has traded his soul for evil—"See, see, where Christ's blood streams in the armament! One drop would save my soul..." but that was in an age of faith. All Maxwell can do in this year of grace is to order a black-out in the theatre, to achieve a midnight of the soul.

It is fine stuff, splendid theatre, drama handled expertly.

The play pivots on the actions of Netta Allen, who carries the role of Rhoda Penmark, an evil child, (remember James and "The Turn of the Screw," and the play, "The Children's Hour"). This child has talent in unlimited quantities. Her gestures, her motions, and that certain smile. What an accomplished little actress.

Then Willard as this change-lin's mother, has to carry the role of a woman through whom the bad seed is sown, and is haggard by thoughts and memories, and eventually driven to find desperate remedies. Thea Willard presented a powerful performance, an enviable episode in Hongkong theatre.

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Jerry Stryker as the janitor, is evil at a lower intellectual level than the child, and the interplay of personalities here is one of the great moments of the play.

Barbara Lawrence, as the bereaved mother, seeks solace in whisky, nature's distilled anodyne for the troubles of this age. As was to be expected, she awarded the audience two remarkable entrances which increased in dramatic interpretation as the play proceeded, while her exit line was drama personified.

Elaine Woolman in the role of a frustrated schoolmistress up against a problem she is unable intellectually to contain, was not too happy in the narrative portions of her role. Her voice was too level and evenly modulated. It robbed lines of their dramatic content.

Michael Talbot did not convince me. He had sipped on horrors, he told us so, but he seemed to suffer no spiritual indignation.

Ton Lewis as a writer, Mario Ferras, Frederic Fisher, and David McGrath, handled lesser roles and this writer feels that the play could have been strengthened had the producer been able to give them a little more time.

And to Loren E. Lawrence, responsible for this great evening, congratulations.

## Festival Theatre

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Scmp 12/11/60 ALEN.

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Scmp - October 13, 1960

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Scmp 10/18/60

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