

AS I SEE IT



Pat Costa

Tennessee Williams' "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" came to TV last week resulting in conflicting (and consequently amusing) reviews by two of America's best known critics. The New York Times' John J. O'Connor found the adaptation starring Laurence Olivier as "Big Daddy" almost totally without merit. TV Guide's Judith Crist calls the play, which incidentally is the first in a series titled "A Tribute to American Theatre," a "brilliant adaptation."

As a viewer who agreed with neither extremist, I was reminded all over again how subjective any critique must be by virtue of its origin, and secondly, that every viewer is a critic who should not let himself or herself be swayed by the professional observer who gets paid for stating his or her opinion.

Obviously, reviewers such as O'Connor and Crist have an advantage over most of us in that they have seen a great deal more theater and thus on the basis of comparison are more likely to give an experienced judgment as to the relative merits of a work. On the other hand, when two such discerning professionals disagree so violently it must give any viewer looking for guidance pause, all of which leads to the question: How does one go about judging whether a work of art (any work of art) is good, bad, great or indifferent?

After reading the widely disparate analyses of "Cat," I mentally pulled out my own list and looked at the factors which help decide whether or not a work has value for me.

First and foremost for this viewer is the application of the question: Does the play (or book or whatever) have the power to make me forget everything but what is happening on stage? Am I oblivious to my surroundings, forgetful that the actors are actors, so caught up in the action and dialogue that I am literally spellbound? If the answers to all those are yes then it's almost certain that I am beholding a masterpiece.

Second: The use of comparison. How does this stack up against other similar efforts I have seen.

Third: Am I learning something? Has the author or artist changed me by exposing me to some heretofore unrevealed truth about the nature

of mankind, about the human condition, about the forces of good and evil, etc.

Fourth: Am I more conscious of the style than I am of the content? Is the tail wagging the dog?

Fifth: Am I sorry to see the play end? Or am I relieved? Or indifferent?

Sixth: Will it stand the test of repetition and of time? Can I sit through this a second time and a third and a fourth and still find it fresh and diverting? Will I be able to look at this in 10 years time and still find it thoughtful and exciting?

Most critics probably use similar criteria or variations of them and still can reach such polarized views of the same work as exemplified by Crist and O'Connor.

Obviously then there is no one right opinion and each of us is entitled to ours, a good thing to remember the next time a conspicuously literate or arty friend asks for yours.

A Christmas Celebration

St. Augustine's School will present a Christmas Pageant, "For Unto Us A Child Is Born," Sunday, Dec. 19, at 3 p.m. in the Church, 410 Chili Ave.

Students in the first through fourth grades will be presenting Christmas songs, customs and dress from various countries. Members of the Chorus and Dance Programs will be performing ethnic songs and dances of the season. A Nativity scene depicting the Holy Family, Magi, shepherds and angels will be performed by members of the fifth and eighth grades.

Miss Mary Jo Mulligan is musical director and Mrs. Helen Rupert the choreographer.

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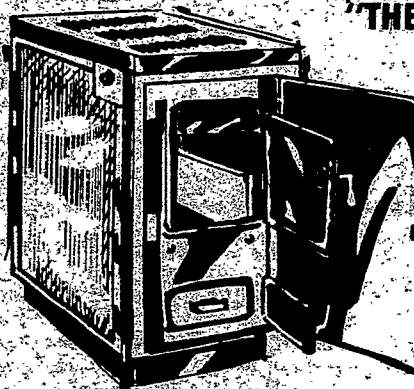


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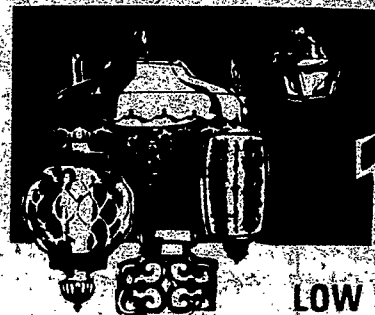
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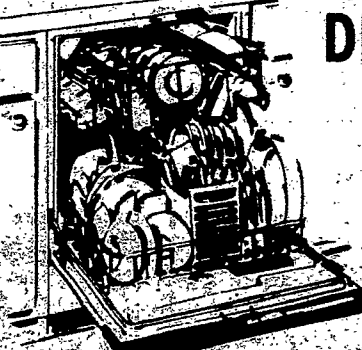
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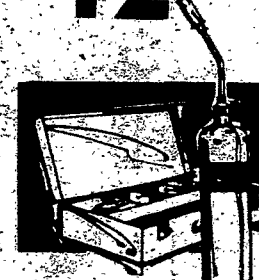
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