

Arts & Entertainment

'Beyond Therapy' awes Ring Theater

By Kelly Murdoch-Kitt
Old Gold and Black Reviewer

The university's theater season was jump-started last week by the Anthony Aston Players' production of "Beyond Therapy".

The show ran from Sept. 17-19, and every performance sold out — with good reason.

Christopher Durang's play is a comedic look at a group of young people stumbling between lovers and therapists' offices. The dialogue is fresh, modern and often shocking — "Beyond Therapy" is not a comedy for innocent ears. The cast successfully maintained the edge intended by the playwright through honest delivery of some astonishingly blunt lines: for example, when Bruce, played by junior Matt Udarvi, first meets Prudence, senior Lindy Krzyzewski, through a personal ad, he wastes no time in telling her, "You have lovely breasts."

Later in the same conversation, Prudence calmly explains her view of male emotional displays. "I don't think men should cry unless something falls on them," she says almost pleasantly.

Not only are the lines unpredictable (and undoubtedly difficult to deliver with a straight face), but the two act play contains nine separate scenes. The combination of a talented cast and senior Drew Droege's direction maintained the play's momentum through its many scene changes.

What at first seems an episodic piece gradually develops into an increasingly complex, linear story line. New characters

are introduced steadily until the end of the second act, which causes a potentially chaotic situation. However, the actors all did an excellent job establishing their relationships to other characters, which held the audience's attention and lent greater realism to the caricatures they were portraying.

The rapport that Krzyzewski and Udarvi established as Prudence and Bruce was the backbone of the show. Theirs is a love-hate relationship between two very different people, studded with their daily encounters of friends and shrinks. Krzyzewski and Udarvi convey the confusion and conflict their characters constantly experience throughout the play with their realistic awkwardness and clashing views.

Dr. Framingham, played by senior Kyle Haden and Mrs. Wallace, freshman Claiborne Heilman are Prudence's and Bruce's respective psychotherapists, who are also polar opposites. Haden and Heilman both seemed to relish their character roles. Haden hammed up Dr. Framingham's bitter chauvinism to an almost frightening proportion, while Heilman maximized Mrs. Wallace's flakiness and eccentricity.

During the play, Mrs. Wallace is currently searching for "the right word." She reads aloud from her mental Rolodex, spitting out a stream of possible word matches. Heilman masterfully tackled these rapid word searching spurts and other quirky characteristics, such as Mrs. Wallace's flamboyant movements (at one point, Heilman was writhing and screaming slurs atop Mrs. Wallace's office desk), and her tendency to emphasize points by barking and gesturing with her stuffed dog.

The facial expressions of the actors were a spectacle in and of themselves. Unfortunately, the blocking and scenic arrange-

ments thwarted the full effects of the actors' emotive faces. This was a possibly unavoidable travesty but had greatest impact on one particular scene.

Bruce, through some odd combination of fate and peculiar charm, somehow ends up dating Prudence. However, Bruce has not yet broken up with Bob, his gay lover, and this inevitably is a source of conflict — especially when Prudence shows up for dinner with Bruce at the apartment he shares with Bob.

The three end up in an extremely awkward situation: they are all tense, angry and seated on the same couch. Because the scene is so awkward, the lines are strained. Subtext becomes crucial but it is more difficult to interpret when the characters are static.

Faces are key to scenes like this, but because of the way the sofa was angled, only about a quarter of the audience had the privilege of seeing them. The sofa scene was easily overlooked, however, because of the humorous foundation upon which the show was built.

The problem arises from staging a play that was originally intended for a proscenium stage as theater in the round. The actors cannot physically face all sides at all times. This issue was addressed in last week's production by alternating the placement of furniture in most of the scenes. Not only did the placement aid in distributing the actors' "face time" with different sections of the audience, but also helped the audience understand where the action was about to take place, such as in Mrs. Wallace's office, Dr. Framingham's office, or the restaurant.

Unlike the characters and situations encompassed by "Beyond Therapy", the set



Jane Oslos/Old Gold and Black

Senior Lindy Krzyzewski and junior Matt Udarvi perform before a packed Ring Theater Sept. 17 in the Anthony Aston Players' production of "Beyond Therapy."

and costumes were fairly simple; anything more complex would have been completely overwhelming. The floor of the Ring Theater was painted black, and a few articles of furniture were rotated on and off stage during the fluid scene changes to represent the office of either therapist, the restaurant where Prudence and Bruce first meet or Bruce and Bob's apartment. Prudence even jokes about the scenery at one point, making a comment that "everything looks the same." The set is so simple that the same sofa is used for both Dr. Framingham's and Mrs. Wallace's offices, as well as Bruce's apartment.

As for costumes, everyone wore fairly simple, chic attire, with the exception of Mrs. Wallace's tree-hugging attire, which was still pretty chic for a zany, aging flower child, but not so overpowering as to squelch the crazy character they clothed.

Though there was some fumbling of lines on opening night, the small glitches went almost unnoticed, particularly in Prudence's and Bruce's anxiety-wrought scenes, where the verbal stumbling seemed almost natural. Any other mistakes or shortcomings of this show were successfully masked by the comedic aspects, which the audience bought and appreciated — three nights in a row.

Visiting pianist earns laurels

By Aileen Socrates
Contributing Reviewer

Arriving on wings of accolades from *The New York Times* and CD review, Japanese-born pianist and recording artist Chitose Okashiro opened this year's



Secret Artist Series on Sept. 15 with an evening of Mozart, Debussy, Scriabin and Schumann. Okashiro, a rare virtuoso, fuses exquisite technique with an acute artistic sensitivity that emanates through the versatility of her musical selections.

In a concert that journeyed through over a century-and-half of music, Okashiro spiraled elegantly and triumphantly through the emotional spectrum, leaving her audience in exhilarated wonder.

Okashiro opens her performance with Mozart's *Sonata in B-flat Major*. A true assessment of her extensive background in aural training, Okashiro's loyalty to Mozart's simplistic theme dominates all three movements. In the "Allegro," Okashiro demonstrated remarkable clarity. Her tonal contrast was both graceful and definitive, switching with ease as the theme progresses from major to minor, melodic to staccato. Okashiro's left hand whispered during the "Adagio," the second movement.

In a movement brimming with elongated phrases, Okashiro's interpretation was pensive and deep. Her slurs possessed a breath-like quality, rising and falling like contemplative sighs.

Instantaneously, she galloped lightheartedly into the "Allegretto." Okashiro's fingers ravenously swallowed streams of rapid-paced scales and she punctuated each accent with a clipped nod of the head.

Okashiro's masterful grasp of period and style further abounded in the *Four Preludes* from Claude Debussy's *Books I & II*. In the first of the *Preludes*, *Des pas sur la neige* ("Footprints in the

Okashiro's musicality painted a wintry scene — the trudging steps of the weary traveler and the serenity of snowfall — transforming Debussy's hauntingly lonely chords into the meaningful and illustrative.

Snow"), her pianissimo was breathtaking. Okashiro's musicality painted a wintry scene — the trudging steps of the weary traveler and the serenity of snowfall — transforming Debussy's hauntingly lonely chords into the meaningful and illustrative. The simplicity of *Des pas sur la neige*, shrouded in expressive tranquillity, was magical.

The second *Prelude*, Debussy's *Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest* ("What the West Wind Saw") is a fury of overlapping hands and speed that demands a seemingly unreachable level of technical brilliance. Okashiro surpassed this challenge, coloring the chaotic whirlwind of chords and phrases with an extraordinarily controlled crescendo and decrescendo. She was dynamic and dramatic, pronouncing all of the rhythmic variations in this musical maelstrom with indefatigable vitality.

La fille aux cheveux de Lin ("The Girl with Flaxen Hair"), the third *Prelude*, returns to a more calm, more quaint tone. Debussy's main theme floats above the piece, softly falling onto the ears. Okashiro's lyricism was radiant, melting one phrase into another throughout the piece.

Preludes concludes with *Feux d'artifice* ("Fireworks"), a piece marked with erratic tempo changes. Okashiro opened *Feux d'artifice* with a sparkling glissando that led into a less dramatic series of descending musical phrases. Effusive, mischievous, explosive, guttural and grandiose, Okashiro unleashed the fireworks through her effusive fingers. Extravagantly, she conquered a foreboding set of flying octaves that push nearly to the end of the piece.

Okashiro concluded the first half of her concert with *Three Etudes* by Russian composer Alexander

Scriabin. The first of these, "Etude in F-Sharp Minor," was perhaps one of the most richly colored selections in Okashiro's performance.

Although Scriabin's music is ambiguous in tone and rhythm, Okashiro used the triplets to unify the music, creating a feeling of romanticism throughout the piece. The effect was exotic, mysterious and forceful.

With its gliding resolution and euphonious line, Scriabin's "Etude in B Major" departs from the cross-rhythms of the first *Etude*. Okashiro seemed to connect the entire piece in one sustained phrase, making the second *Etude* an extended inhalation in anticipation of the final *Etude*.

Okashiro's rendition of Scriabin's "Etude in D-sharp Minor" was majestic. The pace was so frenetic that it was almost feverish.

Okashiro dominated the lower register of the piano, leaving the thunderous, percussive melody heavy in the air.

Midway through the piece, her quality switched from forcefully percussive to impassioned lyricism, exhibiting the blend of technical expertise and sensitive interpretation for which Okashiro is hailed.

Ferociously grasping the two octave jumps in the left hand, Okashiro escalated to an incredible finish.

In the second half of the evening, Okashiro performed Robert Schumann's *Symphonic Etudes Op. 13* and *Op. Posth*. This set of eleven *Etudes* includes five posthumous variations and is a rigorous test of a pianist's concentration and endurance.

Okashiro was unshakable until the end. Her intensity and musical imagery breathed life into this amazing romantic work.

She magnificently recreates all the nuances of passion, hope, meditation and love that Schumann intended in writing this emotion-filled piece.

Okashiro's faultless technique, coupled with her creativity, musical insight and tonal versatility, truly earn her the title of a "young artist of genius in the true sense of the word" (*Art Record*: Japan).

The Matchmaker pairs university with comedy

By Kelly Murdoch-Kitt
Old Gold and Black Reviewer

Thornton Wilder's *The Matchmaker* will open the Mainstage Theater's season at 8 p.m. on Sept. 25. The play, directed by Donald Wolfe, a professor and chairman of theater, tells the story of a charming matchmaking widow named Dolly, played by junior Jennifer Blevins, who is helping the wealthy Mr. Vandergelder, played by junior Randall Chou, and others to find mates.

"It's about a woman who, in her attempt to 'matchmake' and help everyone else out, has, for a long time, ignored her own happiness," said freshman Anita Woolley, who plays the Cook in the production. "She finally knows what she wants, and this play tells how she goes about getting it. I think everyone knows someone like Dolly," Woolley said.

The play takes place at the turn of the century and the period is punctuated by Darwin Payne's elaborate set and Pat Mueller's intricate costumes, both professional designers. "It can be really hard to do period pieces," Woolley said. "You have to make the audience believe the period, but I think that with the costumes and the

beautiful set they've built, you're definitely not in 1998 anymore." The colorful set includes lush fabrics and wooden trims, framed artwork, and antique furniture.

"I love period pieces," Blevins said. "They're always a challenge, but it is important to be conscious of them in order to find your character. You have to incorporate movement and demeanor and really know and understand the period to accurately portray your character."

Most of the actresses wore ankle-length rehearsal skirts and corsets for weeks prior to the performance.

"A corset isn't exactly my cup of tea," Blevins said, "but these costumes are awesome, and they really help the physicality of the characters."

Much research and hard work has gone into recreating the atmosphere of the period and the actors have spent a great amount of time honing their characters. "It is a challenge," Blevins said, "because I have to make her comic, yet also very complex and deep. Making her funny was difficult, because I got so caught up in finding and developing the complex Dolly that I sometimes forgot about the farcical Dolly."

The Matchmaker is indeed farcical; it is light-hearted and full of both verbal and physical antics. "It's an old play, but you can still appreciate how much fun it is probably because it's so charming, and you can look at it and laugh at it," Woolley said.

She attributes the play's appeal to the diversity of the characters. "All the characters are really loveable, even the Cook! She has her own little spark," Woolley said. "It's fun to explore every character like that; they all have little perks and quirks."

Blevins added that the play has a universal theme, which she hopes will appeal to a wide audience. "You need to go out and find your life, find your own adventures and have fun.

"It's a very serious theme communicated through a comedic play, which, I think is the best way to communicate the idea," Blevins said.

Moreover, there is an underlying message of happiness. Blevins and cast hope that this is not just another evening at the theater.

"Hopefully, instead of just walking away happy, they'll walk away thinking about why they are happy," she said.

In conjunction with the play, which runs Sept. 25 and 26 and Sept. 30 through Oct. 4, the departments of English and theater are co-hosting a symposium on playwright Thornton Wilder.

The symposium will be held Sept. 25 at 3 p.m. and continue Sept. 26. The symposium will feature many writers and authorities on Wilder and his works, such as Robin Wilder, the editor of Wilder's letters and alumna Penelope Niven ('62), who has been commissioned to write a biography of Wilder.

Symposium topics will include not only the playwright's life and works, but also a talk on literary management at 1:30 p.m. Sept. 26. All symposium events will be held in Scales 102. Call the box office at Ext. 5295 for more information.



Courtesy of News Services

Thornton Wilder's *The Matchmaker* opens Sept. 25 in the Mainstage Theater.