San Fernando Valley State College

THE MAGIC HORN

An abstract submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Drama

by

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June, 1970
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ABSTRACT

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The spring semester 1970 presentation of the San Fernando Valley State College Theatre for Children was a production of The Magic Horn, a story of Roland and Charlemagne, by Anne Nicholson and Charlotte B. Chorpenning. Twelve performances were presented in the Campus Theatre over three weekends beginning March 6, 1970. The faculty advisor was Professor Mary Jane Evans; settings were designed by Dr. Adolfo Haity-Dube; costumes were by Joyce Kamel; original music was composed and directed by Robert Szuch; and the choreography was by Maryellen Clemons.

Before pre-production planning or casting began, considerable background research was done into the history and legends surrounding the two principal characters as well as the historical period. The company was taken to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art to spend some time with the Cloisters exhibit of art from the Middle Ages which was, fortunately, available at the time. They were urged to read and study the medieval period and the available information on the characters represented. The idea was to attempt to immerse the cast and crew in the atmosphere of the Middle Ages. In some ways this approach was most useful, because it gave them some direction for obtaining a view of
the attitudes and atmosphere in which the play takes place. In some cases it was quite successful.

It was decided that while the play itself is historically inaccurate, it would be possible to project the essence of medieval ideas and still communicate to the child audience in easily understandable terms the simple truths inherent in the story and possibly to imply their applicability to the present day. No effort was made to preach or to inject a moralistic attitude into the production. It was a good exciting story, and the production was designed to present it vividly.

The struggle for power between Falerina, the sorceress, and Charlemagne leads the prince and Roland from the solid stability of the castle into the shifting unreality of Falerina's enchanted garden where magical temptations glow with an unreal light and the stolen sword, Durandal, is suspended in mid-air, surrounded by a protective ring of flames that "seem like fire and are not." This same struggle brings Falerina into the castle setting, where, though the action is set in reality, an aura of magic must still be somewhat pervasive. This provided a special directorial challenge, not only in working with the designers and technicians, but also with the actors to develop levels of realism and non-realism in characterization while remaining faithful to the style of the period.

Generally accepted practice involves elimination of intermissions in performances for child audiences. The Magic Horn had two major set changes, each requiring several minutes. The problem was resolved by changing the scenery behind a scrim drop while the action of the play continued on the stage apron. The first break was covered by the journey of the two boys, preceded by Falerina carrying the stolen
sword into the garden. The second break was covered by the mime troupe which enacted the pantomime in the third scene.

The director is not unhappy with the results of the production. However, if it could be done again, some changes would be made. It is felt that the production provided a learning experience for all members of the company. It gave an insight into the capabilities and weaknesses of the director and provided a defined point from which there could be further growth. It was a well attended production which seemed to provide a satisfying theatrical experience for the child audiences.

On the whole, it is the writer's opinion that it was a successful production and a valid artistic accomplishment by a creative company.