Review

Worries for Dogpatch Life Cease With Light Opener

The Baylor Theater people were a lil' worried about "Li'l Abner" up until a day before it opened Tuesday night—choreography was presenting its difficulties (no, Baylor Theater is not supposed to be torn down the first time a dance is held there, but most of the company of 48 had not had much experience in musical comedy dance movement), there were some rough spots to be ironed out and, worst of all, Daisy Mae's blond wig had not yet arrived from New Yawk.

But even Al Capp would have loved the show after seeing the Studio One curtain fall on its Baylor premiere, for his cartoon characters were portrayed with verve and high spirit ("ebullience," as director Jerry Talley, assistant professor of oral communications, has said) and downright good performing that far overshadowed any defects that remained in the musical after the final rehearsal.

"Li'l Abner," though isn't all Alcappsville. It's a musical comedy by Norman Panama and Melvyn Frank and as such it must leave much of the cartoonist's cutting satire behind in the funny papers and play up the elements of gaiety, festivity, drama and romance — this is what musical comedies are generally for and it's entertainment, ain't it?

Nonetheless, there are some fine slams against Washington, its administration and its perpetual Science Fair, in the play itself and some even better cuts and allusions toward matters of the present moment and geographical location (Baylor, where else?) added to it by Baylor madmen.

For instance, The Lariat gets it bad once (those people just didn't want a favorable review), Dogpatch now has a Tidwell Gulch and Dr. Strangelove's wayward arm plagues a government scientist.

Mike Savage as Li'l Abner and Thelma Phillips as Daisy Mae (whose wig did arrive) and everybody else did a good job, but Carl Deese as Marryin' Sam was really great. Martha Gail Palmer as Scarlett Scragg, Barney Hammond as Dr. Rasmussen T. Finsdale and Rick Hamilton as Evil Eye Fleagle all merit special mention. And Sandy Aronoff provided effective, attention-holding choreography.

"Li'l Abner" continues its run Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Monday and May 6 and 7. Tickets to most performances are still available at $1.50 for reserved seats at the Baylor Theater ticket office.

—Jim Gordon