Talent surfaces as ‘Smoke’ clears

by Michael Campbell

Creighton’s theatre department has provided a gem with the production of Tennessee William’s “Summer and Smoke.”

The play is a two-act love story about two people, Alma Winemiller and John Buchanan, Jr., who love each other but have completely different attitudes about life.

The time and circumstances do not permit them to come together.

Support characters

There is noteworthy support from Arts sophomore Mollie Lawler who played Alma’s mother. Her boisterous antics were well-timed comic relief. Another supporting character is Jack Minton, a May 1979 Creighton graduate who played Dr. John Buchanan Sr.

The set was well-done. Of particular interest is a Styrofoam angel sculpture in center stage which was built by the Rev. Jonathon Haschka, S.J., of the Fine Arts department. He made the angel in an hour according to Creighton director Bill Hutson.

“He’s done other things like this before, working with styrofoam,” Hutson said. “I was amazed when he said that he had worked with just his hands.

Background piano music was used as a transition between scenes.

“The music is all Chopin except the scene with flamingo music. The play has a lot to do with the soul and the soul finding eternity,” Hutson said. “Symbolism is buried in a play; I don’t think it should be prominent. But Chopin has been referred to as the composer of the soul and I chose the music because of that and also because Alma is a music teacher. It emphasizes the aspect that music is all she really has.”

Hutson said he is not really sure of the significance of the title “Summer and Smoke.”

“I don’t know,” he said. “I’ve thought a lot about that but I’m not really sure. I think it has something to do with passion. The fire of passion and what’s left over—the smoke, the ashes of an affair that doesn’t turn out quite right.”

Alma, Arts sophomore Mary Kelly, is a reserved Southern minister’s daughter and John, Arts junior Mark Mazzie, is a drunken doctor who constantly gambles.

Both Kelly and Mazzie prove there is much talent hidden in the Little Theatre with excellent performances.

Actors complement

Kelly uses a high-pitched voice to convey the nervousness of her character and one thinks she is going to have a nervous breakdown on stage a few times. Mazzie is totally opposite. He is calm and the two complement each other well.

The play begins about 1900 when the two are very young, probably nine or 10 years old. Alma gives John a box of handkerchiefs so he could wipe his dirty face, and it is in this scene they both realize they love each other.

The scene changes to about 16 years later when John returns from John Hopkins Medical School in Baltimore, Maryland. His life goes downhill with continued drinking, gambling and physical pleasures during the summer.

They both love each other but can never get together because of their different attitudes toward life. It is not until the end that John realizes Alma’s high idealism is right, but it is too late.

“Summer and Smoke” leads, Mark Mazzie and Mary Kelly, in one scene from the show.