

AN EGGS-CITING DEBUT

Jersey stage troupe gets big 'roll' on White House lawn

By BETTESPERO

The Pushcart Players are on a roll.

The well-traveled troupe from Verona is a featured attraction today at the 113th annual Easter Egg Roll for children on the White House lawn in Washington, D.C.

This afternoon Pushcart is to perform "Stone Soup and Other Stories," one of the company's original musicals for youngsters.

"There is an emphasis on storytelling," explained Ruth Fost, Pushcart managing director. "Our show fits in well with that theme."

"Stone Soup and Other Stories" is composed of four folktales from around the world: Africa, America, India and Russia.

"This show promotes books and reading. We use the word 'library' several times," Fost said. She noted that one of the stories, "The Long One," is an African tale that has a rabbit as a central character.

The players will perform for a half-hour outdoors. "The stories are very adaptable," commented Fost. "They have a nice, informal feeling which should suit the garden setting."

She considers the small-scale show ideal for young children, pre-kindergarten age through fourth grade. But parents and grandparents like it, too.

In adapting the show for its lawn engagement, the players eliminated the sets. Props and costumes will act as "scenery." Performers will sing a capella, with a glockenspiel instead of a keyboard for musical accompaniment.

Actors are Tim Herman and Anna



Photo by John A. Gibson Jr.

Members of the Verona-based Pushcart Players rehearsing for today's Easter Egg Roll at the White House are, from left, Jeffrey Wingfield of Orange, Anna Smyrve of Montclair and Susie Paplow of Morrisstown

Smyrve, both of Montclair; Jeffrey Wingfield of Orange, and Susie Paplow of Morrisstown. Sandi Zimmermann of Somerville is the musician. Geoffrey Morris of Montclair is stage manager.

Besides performing their own show, the players plan to take part in other Egg Roll activities during the day. "We hope to send our regards to the first lady and her husband," quipped

Fost.

Chances of that are slight, Fost conceded. Security precautions have ranged from White House requests for the birth dates and Social Security numbers of company members to lists of props and costumes.

The troupe will transport its personnel and accoutrements to the White House in two theater company vans. Official credentials issued to the troupe will ease the vans' entry through the White House gates.

A month ago Karen Giorno, a staff member of the White House Visitors Office, invited Pushcart Players to perform at the annual fete. It was short notice for the troupe, which has become accustomed during its 18-year history to a full, year-round calendar in schools, libraries, museums and theaters. But today happened to be an open date on the pushy Pushcart schedule.

The troupe performs regularly throughout New Jersey and farther afield in the New York metropolitan area. Last fall the players carried off quite an acting coup by staging one of their children's shows in Kiev, the capital of Ukraine.

When the Players returned from their theatrical trek, Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.) read their accomplishment into the Congressional Record. The troupe has invited him to the Egg Roll.

The thespians cannot linger long on the lawn. They must return right away to New Jersey, where their next show is tomorrow at the Paper Mill Playhouse in Millburn. There they will perform "Are We There Yet, Mr. Columbus?"

Sophocles rocks MSC

The Montclairion/Thursday, May 3, 1990 15.

By Audrey Regan
Staff Writer

A classic endures time. *Antigone*, now playing in Memorial Auditorium, is a classic that has taken a long time—all semester—for MSC's Mainstage Theater Series to put together, and as director Geoffrey Newman, dean of the School of Fine and Performing Arts, says, "present a classic piece and make it relevant to today's world."

It does just that, and some. Written by the great Sophocles, *Antigone*, part of the Oedipus trilogy, deals with much more than a bunch of Greeks with fatal flaws. Sophocles wrote about human nature and Antigone's struggle, and her "not to hate was I born, but to love" still moves audiences today.

Folks, don't be scared. Although the play is the original translation, the lights, music and staging is modern. It's not like those renditions of the old Greek plays. There are no masks here! And Creon wears pants! "It's more like Battlestar Antigone, by Sa-focals," said chorus member, Debbie Giordano.

"The hardest part was dealing with the language," confessed Director Newman. But director, that's the test of great acting! Can these actors and actresses convey the emotion with language we only read in ancient literature?

Well, this is one test *Antigone* aced. All the acting is professional and superb, to say the least (except you do have to

crane to hear the chorus at times).

When Creon (fabulous job, John Wooten) grabs Antigone (another fabulous job, Maureen O'Dowd) and pushes her down in rage, anger and tense music fills the theater. "We'll have no woman's law here while I live!" proclaims Creon. We are angry and while the chorus lines the stage, our anger subsides.

Then, moments later, we are caught in a father and son battle where Haemon (excellently portrayed by Christopher DeBari) is torn between defending Antigone, whom he loves, and his father, Creon, whom he obeys. We feel his pain. We feel his struggle, and we feel Creon's frustration in his deep throat beckon, "Haemon!"

And Teiresias! (wow! Jeffrey L. Wingfield) That purple mystical prophet who echoes words of wisdom and warning is just mesmerizing.

This play works. Ismene (Linda Walsh) and the messenger (Roger Mazzeo) are perfectly cast and the whole chorus interacts and balances the protagonist's dramatic clashes with art.

But how is the play relevant today? Director Newman listed a few of the many themes:

"There's the male vs. female," there is. Ismene says to Antigone, "We are but women. It is not for us to go against men." Creon agrees, "Better if it must happen that a man should over set me. I won't be called weaker than womankind," sure to make all women's blood boil.

"There's the state vs. personal

beliefs," there is. Antigone would rather not "live and defy the laws of Heaven" while Ismene "cannot go against the laws of the state!"

"Hey," director Newman says, "this is what the times are all about right now! Even the demise of the Eastern Bloc makes these kinds of issues interesting and important today."

So Sophocles still shines and so does this production. Audience—you don't have to be English majors or be versed in Greek literature to appreciate all the work that went into this. You do have to listen, but after a few minutes the language will seem natural.

If it doesn't, just go to appreciate the work of the guest artists - Robert Klinghoefer (scenic designer), Kari Margolis and Tony Brown (movement direction and sound design) and Bill Simmons (lighting designer).

All do an outstanding job of non-verbally communicating the human element, struggle and emotion that remains universal before Sophocles' time right up to today.

A powerful ending to MSC's Mainstage Theater Series! And, a powerful visual ending that Sophocles may not have envisioned.

This is quality theater. This is one production all MSC students should see not only to appreciate what a professional job their peers are doing, but to easily understand the timeless relevance of the words Sophocles wrote centuries ago.

arts/entertainment