

STAGE REVIEW

'Prince' Given U.S. Premiere

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One of the highlights of the Valvermo Fall Festival, staged by the Benedictine Monks of St. Andrew's Priory on their ranch grounds in the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains over the weekend, was the American premiere of Antoine De St-Exupery's "The Little Prince" in the priory's outdoor theater.

Long a children's fable, "The Little Prince" emerges here as a statement of self-realization for adults in a troubled world.

Theologians view it as a retelling of the Christian story but Warren J. Deacon, who adapted and directed this production for Newport Beach's Open End Theater Company, is less interested in what it means than in the lovely story which prompts a sense of wonder and belonging in an increasingly alienated society.

'THE LITTLE PRINCE'

A one-act play adapted and directed by Warren J. Deacon from Antoine De Saint-Exupery's book, translated from the French by Katherine Woods. Presented in its American premiere by the Open End Company in Valvermo Bowl at the 13th annual Valvermo Fall Festival, St. Andrew's Priory. Production Designer Cheryl Peet. Choreographer Matti Lascoe. Lighting director William C. Todd. Sound director Paul Barreras. Music composed and performed by Fred Katz. Cast: William Verderber, Dennis Wheeler, Jayne Hamil, Michael Leininger, Richard Hoover, Steve Wagner, Hymen Katz, Sandra Mathews-Deacon, Douglas McEwan, Sue Flint, Cecilia Knudsen, Jackie Benington, Cheryl Krauter and Timothy Constant.

St.-Exupery was a French flying ace and aviation enthusiast who helped establish mail routes across the South Atlantic and in South America. He survived serious crashes in the Guatemalan jungle and the Libyan desert but was killed in 1944, shot down by the Nazis over the Mediterranean.

William Verderber plays St-Exupery who begins the tale by telling his young nephew, Jean, about a strange exper-

ience he had when his plane was forced down on the Libyan desert, "the loveliest and saddest landscape in the world . . ."

Here the little prince appears looking for an elusive sheep and finds out how odd adults are. They are only interested in adding up figures and in "important things" without knowing what is important, he discovers.

The little prince brings a sense of universal intuition and faith, and the message that one can only truly see with the heart. What is essential is invisible to the eye.

I suppose one can read other things into this fable, but its charm is its essential

simplicity. Read too much into it and the wonder is lost.

A cast of 16 performed on the ground under the stars, on the surrounding hills and on top of a stone structure that is part of the stage.

Scenes and cartoons are flashed on a screen set up on the upper level to depict the author's library and illustrate the sheep he had so much trouble drawing for the little prince.

Dennis Wheeler played both the nephew and the prince, falling easily into the spirit of the fantasy. Jayne Hamil, Michael Leininger, Richard Hoover, Steve Wagner, Hymen Katz, Sandra Mathews-Deacon and Douglas McEwan delivered delightful character bits.

Fred Katz played his own music on the cello which added an eerie accompaniment to this mystical drama on the desert.