

New Name, new leader at Champlain

By Dan Wolfe

I caught the last performance of Eugene O'Neill's *Ah Wilderness!* Presented by Champlain Theatre, the new name for a continuing group of actors and technical support people from whose number Donald Rowe retired last year. The new head of the group is Joanne Farrell.

When I had spoken to Farrell earlier in the year she had told me of a plan to direct a first play that could be like a staged reading. Instead, the production of *Ah Wilderness!* Was staged, costumed and, lit as fully as one could wish, but with a set that contained only the bare minimum of furnishings.

John Alexander played Nat Miller the pater familias of the Miller family. He added another increasingly well-drawn characterization to his list of fine performances. It was a subtle performance and a heartwarming one.

The balance of the cast was filled with Champlain Players' regulars: Janice Gohm-Webster (Essie Miller), Ken Wade (Sid Davis, Essie's Brother), and Colin Cramer (Arthur Miller). Seth Jarvis played the crucial role of Richard very well, and made the later acts standouts. He worked especially well with Alexander and with Alexandra Sevakian (Muriel). The house that Rowe built was substantial enough to remain intact, both onstage and behind the scenes. Sue Wade was there to costume the show, Kris Jarrett to provide technical support.

Farrell did a decent job of directing, but to form any substantive opinions based on this show would be heard to do, and unfair to her, although her thoughtfulness about the problem of having an ultra-realistic set and replacing that need with a reading of the O'Neill's stage direction was inspired. She chose the play and cast it; in both areas she did well. Beyond that she seemed to get to the heart of the play.

I look forward to the future of this group.