

Poignant Little Opera Bows in Miami;

'Holocaust' Score Is Lyrical, Solid

It was something close to a miracle, Michael Braz's first opera, "Memoirs From the Holocaust," which bowed to the world, and a small audience, at Barry College Saturday night. It was really not in the cards to happen, not a success like this.

But Braz, a college choral director, was inspired to write this poignant one-acter after visiting Dachau concentration camp, and there is no guesswork about his talent.

This is a solid, serious opera, the result of a spontaneous talent for the lyric stage, with something to say and the means to say it. It was successful in what it intended, and mostly in what it achieved.



**JAMES
ROOS**

FOR ONE THING, the material is there in the story of small-town anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany. For another, the music is an inextricable part of the story, expertly conceived for voices in a Menotti-like, lyrical way.

The strength of the opera lies in

its brooding background of isolated loneliness, the spectre of rank brutality, the raw courage of the Jewish mother, Hanna, and the transformation of her little boy, Hans, a less innocent Yniold peering into the abyss of humanity's hatred.

Call it variations on a macabre theme of despair, a taut illustration of youth corrupted, as the 17-year-old Kurt becomes a symbol of tormented conscience. As Hans' older playmate he was like a brother. As a young Hitler brown shirt he helped murder Hans' father and, ultimately, his mother, leaving the boy to walk hand in hand with the old man, Vati, as they are herded to their final destination.

IT IS COMPELLING theater, rarely static through its one-hour stretch, though something ought to be done about the ending, which is overextended, its taped choral fragments synchronized to human silhouettes, with the high-flung swastika, veiled behind a scrim.

The staging is simple and ade-

quate for what a pinched purse can buy, the mounting made possible by Temple Sinai of North Dade. The singing — well. The outstanding member of the cast is Mikki Shiff, a good mezzo with a flair for music drama.

THE OTHERS are capable, trained in ensemble, quite at home in carefully cast roles, if scarcely brilliant of voice. Still, Don Bennett sings well in the guise of the old man, as does Jerry Minster as Kurt, with quavering limitations. And Michael Wantuck is a convincing Hans, though the line sometimes strains his fragile production.

True, at times they are cardboard figures on a static stage indulging in declamation. But Braz's melodious score is spiked with enough bracing dissonance to underscore drama, and his piano playing in the pit had authority.

Now, how about a repetition, with an orchestra in that pit, and the rough spots polished on what apparently is a sterling little opera?