

Pax 'My Fair Lady' stodgy

By Dennis Sprick

BUDD LAKE— Except for its lovely score, I don't like "My Fair Lady." Its stateliness bores me, while the Cockney accents grate on my nerves. When the 1964 film was shown on television in 1973, I fell asleep somewhere around "The Ascot Gavotte."

Knowing that I differ with millions of theater and filmgoers throughout the world, I approached the Pax Amicus production of "My Fair Lady." After seeing this production, I still don't like the show — but for reasons inherent in the Pax production. Stan Barber has directed his background players in the same stodgy manner that have slowed other Pax musicals, "South Pacific" being the prime example.

When R.J. Steele as Freddy sings, "People stop and stare, they don't bother me," in "On the Street Where You Live,"

the couples literally walk across the stage and give Freddy too-exaggerated expressions. When Eliza bats Freddy about while singing "Show Me," Steele limply tumbles instead of being more knockabout. When the dancers do some high-kicking during "Get Me to the Church on Time," they laughingly all fall down at their prearranged cue, leave Doolittle alone on stage to sing some more, then absurdly come out of nowhere to dance behind him again.

Among the leading players, Steele is disappointing principally because he has perhaps the most melodic song in the Lerner and Loewe score. His rendition of "Street" is vocally inconsistent; he suddenly holds notes and loudly emphasizes them without any pattern.

Although the background is static, "Lady's" leading players acquit themselves well. As Eliza, Marielaine

Mammon lends an unusually light touch to "I Could Have Danced All Night" and transmits a winsome, charming joy. She has trouble pacing herself in the difficult "Show Me" and rushes some dialogue, but Mrs. Mammon steps lightly in her dances, looks pretty in the gorgeous green and white gowns provided by costumers Frank and Doris Conner, and lends a professional touch with her singing.

Jauntier in his dances and delivery is the popeyed Ken Stevens as Alfred Doolittle. Margaret Stevens, his wife, is warm and sympathetic as the mother of Henry Higgins, while Paul Eagle is smooth and likable as Col. Pickering, friend to Higgins and Eliza.

As Henry Higgins, Charles May could have blustered his way through the role, but he keeps a just right tone of imperviousness and puzzlement and expresses that tone with crinkled nose,

pursed lips, hands in the pocket and behind the back and his pacing. He talk-sings his songs, making smooth transitions from the idyllic picture of a bachelor's life in the first part of "I'm an Ordinary Man" to the more frenzied portion of the song when a woman enters that life.

May sets the tone for what is enjoyable in this Pax production. But a smooth performance cannot disguise or overshadow the lifeless background players and direction.

"My Fair Lady" will be performed 8 p.m. Wednesday, Friday and Saturday until April 26, with special Sunday matinees March 23 and 30 and April 20. All seats are reserved and may be obtained by calling 584-3900 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday to Friday and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday.