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Not So Merry Men

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In "Robin Hood: A Political Romance," Sherwood Forest is far darker and more troubled than in the usual fairy-tale versions.

This dramatization includes a Robin Hood who orders throats cut, a member of the "Merry Men" who betrays his fellows and a King Richard who denounces not only the Muslims he intends to fight in the Crusades but also the Jews and Gypsies at home. Villains and heroes are no longer so sharply delineated, and the action unfolds through multiple subplots that would rival those of a Shakespearean tragedy.

Written and directed by Dan Friedman and presented by Youth Onstage!, a branch of the All Stars Project that features mostly teenage actors, this ambitious interpretation portrays Robin Hood (Antoine Joyce) as a thief whose generosity is first directed toward his own band. He eventually becomes a moral leader who undertakes a risky plot to defeat the corrupt Prince John (Peter Graham) and the Sheriff of Nottingham (Michael Alcide). Ultimately he has to decide whether to welcome back his sovereign, as Maid Marian (Alethea Rivera)

WEEKEND Arts FINE ARTS LEISURE

Family Fare



From left: The Sheriff of Nottingham (Michael Alcide) and Robin Hood (Antoine "RL" Joyce) in the climactic sword fight from the Youth Onstage! production of *Robin Hood: A Political Romance*.

urges, or wage an all-out revolt against the nobility, as the rather Marxist-sounding Little John (Devon Ewalt) desires. The play asks whether in making a politician's choice, Robin Hood isn't also becoming another kind of thief.

Although clearly not for small children - the medieval characters kill one another and use contemporary vulgarisms - this two-hour "Robin Hood" offers thea-

tergoers 10 and older many rewards, including songs, puppetry and Hollywood-worthy sword fights. Most important, it puts a human face on a beatified legend.

"Robin Hood: A Political Romance," through March 27 at the All Stars Project, 543 West 42nd Street, Clinton, (212) 941-1234. Fridays at 7 p.m.; Saturdays at 3 and 7 p.m. (except March 12); Sundays at 3 p.m. Tickets: \$15.