

The arts

Stage West: Good food, good farce

What better pastime could be there after one has slogged through a buffet of epicurean proportions than to sit back and burp one's way through a light farce? The opportunity to indulge in this sort of fare is currently available in the play 'See How They Run', by Phillip King, playing at Stage West.

The farce, for what it is, is well written, employing all the stock elements of this genre. To list: a comic setting, (an English vicarage) an assorted comic cast which consists of a vicar, the vicar's wife (an ex-American actress), a bishop, a cockney maid, a teetotaling old maid (till the second act), an American serviceman, a cockney soldier, and get this - an escaped Russian spy. Add to that enough instances of mistaken identity and fast punchy dialogue, liberally sprinkled with puns and inuendo, and you are justified in putting the bromo-seltzer back in the purse.

It is pretty difficult to fail with this kind of a set up, but it is accomplished through a combination of poor acting and overwrought directing.

The imported Dawn Wells playing the lead role of the vicar's wife, through her own admission claims the part as her first in a farce. This might explain her lacklustre performance in a role around which the entire play revolves. The strength of the play seems to lie in its unique, varied characterisations - a collection of diverse personalities for which the vicar's wife is employed as the major focal point.

Wells undermines the strength of her largely by her contrived delivery of dialogue and action, which destroys the smooth, natural ease with which the play should move along. But this is criticism of an empty, irrelevant sort when one considers Wells is the drawing card for Stage West and that the actress of Gilligan's Island is going to receive her applause regardless of what, or how she does it.

Alex Moir, as the vicar, counteract Wells' uneasiness with an unpretentious rendering of a shy, reserved vicar who goes somewhat loco, after being hit on the head during the second act.

Moir fits his part well, tempering his fluctuating part with natural skill, bridging the gap between sobriety and outrageousness. Here is an actor whose ability exceeds the expectations of a dinner theatre. Much the same can be said of Miss Scillon (Joan Hurley), an upstanding "old maid" of the vicar's parish, who plays her part with a natural feeling. Through Hurley's efforts Miss Scillon turns into a solid character, because of her pomposity, and real because Hurley brings out the sensitiveness lurking behind the pompous facade. Except for a sluggish start Hurley explores her role with a keen perception.

Richard Gishler, playing the part of an American corporal stationed in England, has a weakness for one-upmanship, which is usually wrangled

without much effort from Dawn Wells. The Bishop of Lax (Richard Savill) although well cast, kept blowing his lines. Alan Stebbings as one more person of the cloth, is too heavily cloaked by the demands of the part; another shy, gentle, subdued personality, who by his very appearance at the height of shennaniganism in the vicarage if funny - but there is much more potential in his part than was realised.

In her part as a cockney maid, (Kathie Ball) overdoes much of her performance, which is not helped by her self-conscious rendering of a cockney accent. This impression is heightened by Sergeant Towers (Brian Taylor), whose cockney accent rings true to form. The appearance of Brian Atkins as an escaped Russian spy gives a nice absurd twist to the play; the question 'What am I doing here?' is ingrained in his bewildered countenance. Consequently we have a performance that divorces itself from the underlying falsity that pervades throughout the play.

William Fisher's direction regulates the first act with a well-paced tempo, but for the rest of the play he loses that control. There are times (notably in the second act) when the pacing is so fast the effectiveness of the lines is lost in the confusion, evidenced by the audience straining their ears to catch it all, and the actors' own discomfort. If Mr. Fisher were to take the last two acts a bit slower, the play as a whole might come across a bit more effectively.

I wouldn't recommend this play for people on a tight budget, or for people looking for more than a 'leisurely night' on the town. But if you have just tied up a contract with Lockheed or something, and you are wondering where to celebrate along with all your cronies - this is the place. The food is good, and the farce is guaranteed to chuckle away some of those unnecessary ulcers, calories, or other afflictions.

by Beno John



The Hovel's last big-name act of the month - the Dillard's. The last time they were here, this five-piece bluegrass/rock'n'roll group from Denver packed the house. So if you want to hear them play (Feb. 19 through Feb. 22) go early. Admission is \$3.50 for members and \$5 for non-members.

Once upon a time ... Happily ever after

True, it is exam week and, true, we all have a lot of work to do. Still, the Studio Theatre production of *The Game of Love and Chance* is worth seeing. The quaint humor of this Marivaux play is guaranteed to give hearty chuckles.

This eighteenth century comedy of manners has a predictable story line. Monsieur Orgon has arranged a marriage between his daughter, Silvia, and a son's friend, Dorante, that will only take place if both young people agree. In order to observe the other more closely, each changes roles with their servants. Love prevails and Silvia and Dorante succumb in spite of the changed roles. To make the story complete, Silvia's maid and Dorante's valet fall in love and everyone lives happily ever after.

The characters were portrayed well. Silvia and Dorante were refined and elegant. Mario, Silvia's brother, was a delightful fop. While M. Orgon did not look old enough to be Mario's father at all times and his voice occasionally sounded forced, he did come across as a kindly father figure. The maid and the valet were obviously servants in demeanor, voice and movement. These characterisations added to the charm of the evening.

The sets were cleverly complimentary to the atmosphere of the play. Simply and vividly they conveyed the

delicate gentility of the eighteenth century upper middle-class home. The design was excellent for the light tone, and provides constant interest.

I felt that two intermissions of ten minutes each were too long; there's not that much to do

in Corbett Hall.

The Game of Love and Chance runs until Feb. 21 with 8:30 pm performances. Tickets are free for students and \$2.50 for non-students. Seeing this play would be a fine way to procrastinate. by Janet Russell

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