

St. Lawrence stages Sheridan

Rivals' convoluted comedy is entertaining to the end

By AGNES KRUCHIO
It is a truism that to do comedy well takes much more than to do tragedy well; to do a comedy of

manners with an array of entertaining characters that can easily degenerate into caricatures and yet maintain the audience's interest to

the very end of its three-hour run is even more difficult. Yet the St. Lawrence Centre production of Richard Sheridan's 18th century

comedy of manners, The Rivals, does just that.

The plot consists of a convoluted series of mistaken identities, of romance, intrigue, jealousy, generation-gap type of misunderstanding, and, wouldn't you know it, true love. Mrs. Malaprop, a staunch dowager living in the fashionable health-spot of Bath protects her beautiful rich niece Lydia Languish with a ferocity "like a dragon's". Captain Absolute, a well-off offspring of local gentry is in love with Lydia, but to win her heart he pretends to be a poor soldier.

This in turn infuriates his irascible father Sir Anthony Absolute, who is planning to secure Lydia's hand in marriage for his son. The plot is further thickened in a series of subplots and misunderstanding to the point that Captain Absolute sets out to duel with his rival, Captain Beverly, who turns out to be no other than his own sweet self.

It's all very complicated, and the fact that the whole play does not come down in shambles around the ears of the cast is due to the clear-sighted, intelligent direction of Alan Scarfe, who has taken the time and effort to develop each of the characters into credible flesh and blood humans. The whole production is carefully orchestrated, the tempo is maintained all along, and the play remains entertaining to the very end.

Jennifer Phipps as Mrs. Malaprop has a resounding raspy voice which she exercises with a great deal of



Jennifer Phipps as Mrs. Malaprop.

zeal, and a sense of timing that allows her to drop her malapropisms at the worst possible moments.

Barry Boys as Jack Absolute is a lovable elfin character whose name has little to do with his personality. His leading lady, Sara Botsford on the other hand lives up only too much to her character's name; lacking sufficient stage presence, her character was the weakest in the whole play. Maureen McRae as Lydia's cousin Julia has some great moments as a genteel woman whose true love has been trifled with; she draws a character whose dignity and sense of self-worth is both refreshing and touching.

The play runs through until December 21, nightly except Monday at 8:30 p.m. Student rush tickets are \$2.00, and are available at 8 p.m.

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