

'Male Animal' retains whimsy

By ETHEL SIMMONS

"The Male Animal" by James Thurber and Elliott Nugent seems to have lost much of its dramatic impact for the campus free-speech issue it espouses.

But the current production at Meadow Brook Theatre still will appeal to you for its whimsical, although somewhat dated humor.

Edgar Meyer is big and befuddled as the midwest university professor who finds himself having marital problems at the same time he is fighting for his ideals and job.

Meyer captures the boyish pique of the professor suddenly faced by his wife's one-time-football-hero boyfriend. He seems to give up and offer her to his rival a little too easily, even though the lines are in the script.

Priscilla Morrill as his wife Ellen has an elegance and charm that carry her through the ticklish situations, and she appears quite at home in the part.

The action takes place in the Turners' comfortable home on campus, a set done by Doug Wright.

Ellen's old beau, Joe Ferguson, is an easy-going, slick type, played with skill by Stephen G. Arlen. Ferguson handles everything with aplomb, despite the fact that he has to beat a

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hasty retreat.

Other men on the scene include William Le Massena as Ed Keller, a member of the college's board of directors, and Harold Roe as Dean Frederick Damon. Le Massena is capable as the bombastic director, who opposes free speech when it makes waves, but he tends at times to overact.

Roe makes a nice try, as the sprightly, grey-haired dean, but he lacks presence. He has some funny lines that aren't given their due.

LOUISE MARTIN turns in a good performance as the dean's turns in a good, low-key performance as the dean's helpful wife. Marianne Muellerleile is a maybe-too-silly Myrtle Keller, the director's wife.

Mary Pat Gleason plays one of those good, dumb-but-warm-hearted maids, this one named Clara, and she came across as a real person.

Besides the adults, there are the college students: The Turners' niece Patricia Stanley, played by Patricia

Reilly, whose has two beaux much like mother's rivals. There is the football player Wally Myers, portrayed by Tom Spackman, and Michael Barnes, editor of the literary magazine, played by Thom Bray.

Bray has a fine instinct for comedy in his role as the editor who criticizes the professor's plan to read a controversial, famous letter in the classroom.

Thin and long-limbed, with spectacles, he looks barely old enough to be a college boy, but he can hold his own. He matches the wit of the professor, in a drunk scene they share.

MS. REILLY looks young, too, yet she has a sophisticated quality that makes her seem much too mature for the boyfriends.

Spackman as the fat, fat player is not a big bruiser but just your average nice guy.

The professor, his wife and her ex-boyfriend, incidentally, all look older than just 15 years out of college, as the script indicates. Some of the actions would be less foolish and more appropriate to struggling years rather than mellowing ones.

This production of "The Male Animal," directed by Torrence Kilburn, Meadow Brook's artistic director, is scheduled to tour Michigan after closing its run at the theater April 16.

It's a nostalgic show, and there are wistful touches not only in the story but in the costuming, too, such as saddle shoes, stockings with seams. Mary Lynn Bonnell did the costumes for the comedy set in autumn, 1939.



At Will-O-Way

"And I know you're not Snow White!" says Mrs. Baker (Dee Dweley of Bloomfield Hills) to her blind son's girlfriend, Jill (Eileen Weiss of Pleasant Ridge) in "Butterflies Are Free." The comedy by Leonard Gershe is being extended through April 15 at Will-O-Way Repertory Theatre in Bloomfield Hills. Curtain rises at 8:30 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays. Reservations may be made by calling 644-4418.

Barn slates open auditions

Auditions are open to the public for two forthcoming productions of the Barn Theatre at Oakland University. Open auditions for "In the Boom Boom Room" will be held 7:30-10 p.m. Monday-Wednesday. Auditions for "Agape" will be held May 2, 3 and 4 from 6:30-10 p.m. All auditions are in the Barn Theatre.

Open June 2 and run Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings through June 18. "Agape" opens June 23 and runs Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings through July 2. Both plays will receive short runs in September so cast members must be available both now and in early fall. For additional information contact the Barn Theatre at 377-2245.

Museum production liberates Cinderella

The Henry Ford Museum presentation of the children's classic "Cinderella" adds a playful twist to this timeless tale by giving the heroine inner beauty instead of good looks.

In this version, Cinderella is the ugly duckling in a household of cruel but beautiful stepsisters. The handsome prince lives in a palace inhabited by

glamorous women, but he yearns for inner beauty.

The play, adapted for the theater by Joseph French, manager, Theater Arts Department, Henry Ford Museum, still contains the classic episode with the glass slipper and many of the characters of the original story, including the fairy godmother and the stepmother.

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