

'A Touch of Spring'—refreshing new production

By BARBARA MICHAELS

Although the title might seem a little out of joint for October, everything else about Samuel Taylor's rollicking comedy, "A Touch of Spring," is in fine working order. The show continues at Will-O-Way Repertory Theatre Friday and Saturday evenings through Oct. 13, and the production is a sheer delight.

Taylor's witty dialogue satirizes Italian inefficiency, British reserve and American provincialism. Along the way, it takes some swipes at television commercials, Italian movies and American embassies. The laughs are frequent and hearty, but the play never loses its tone of light-hearted romance.

This is Italy—land of blue skies and red tape; sardonically remarks Alexander Ben Claborn, a somewhat stuffy St. Louis businessman who has come to Italy to search for his father's body. The elder Claborn, recently killed in an auto accident while vacationing in Italy, has some heads buried in a tangle of government red tape.

ONCE THE BODY is located, securing permission to export it from Italy turns as another insurmountable obstacle. Disgusted at Italian inefficiency, Sandy Claborn's domineering wife packs up and heads home, leaving baby alone in Rome. Emer Baldassarre Pazzalone (Baldo for short), a "professional assistant" sent by the American Embassy, and Alison Ames, a British dish Alison has been searching in vain for the remains of her mother, who

died in the same auto accident as Sandy's father.

The three quickly decide to join forces for an assault on Italian bureaucracy. The first decisive step? A leisurely lunch, for everything in Rome closes tight between 1 p.m. and 4. Sandy is outraged at such a waste of time, but, when in Rome...

Before long both Sandy and Alison have fallen prey to the romantic charms of Rome in the sprangite. Their budding love affair has been actively coaxed by Baldo's seductive urgings. Baldo willingly admits to being the serpent in their Garden of Eden, persuading Sandy to take a bite of the apple and shed his mid-American inhibitions.

Top acting plaids go to Jack Cortes as Baldo, the ebullient, pleasure-loving Italian for whom life is an endless round of seductions. Cortes' body English and range of facial expressions enhance his comedic talents, as when he attempts to seduce a horrified Sandy.

ANOTHER MEMORABLE moment is watching the effervescent Italian vasily delude under a telephone barrage from Mrs. Claborn.

Andy Hurley as Sandy and Kathy Heard as Alison both deliver strong, thoroughly convincing performances. Hurley ably projects Sandy's vulnerability. Miss Heard is an attractive, appealing Alison, and she does a nice job of handling the British accent as well. Eileen Weiss is highly effective as Sandy's iron-willed, slightly shrewish wife

Hal Doyle is amusing and convincing as Mr. Wesley, the bungling young third secretary from the American Embassy, who trips over his own feet almost as much as he trips on Italy's red tape.

Other supporting roles are humorously filled by Vaughan Heard as a lecherous Italian movie director and Gred Hoenstine as an aged, creaking hotel porter. The excellent Will-O-Way production, under the direction of Celia Merrill Tum-

er, is generally fast-paced except for some painfully slow scene changes. It's always refreshing to have a local theater group present a play that is unfamiliar to area residents instead of sticking exclusively to well-known Broadway hits.

"A Touch of Spring" recently had a successful London run following an earlier stint on Broadway under a different title, but Will-O-Way brings it to this area for the first time.

Wine chapter honored

The Oakland County chapter of Les Amis du Vin, the nation's largest wine consumer organization, has been awarded the highest award of Les Amis du Vin—the Order of Merit.

Ron Fonte, executive director and editor of the wine education group said, "Oakland County has been chosen from among our 50 chapters in 22 states for our highest honor because of their imaginative wine tasting events of the previous year and their devoted adherence to Les Amis du Vin philosophy."

Les Amis du Vin, founded in 1963 by a Frenchman, Hubert Gourdin, is dedicated to the belief that wine should be taken from the pedestal of adoration and high prices and placed on the dinner table, where, consumed in moderation, it can greatly enhance the American quality of life.

The Latins have been drinking wine this way for centuries.

Fonte noted the extraordinary efforts put forth by the local Oakland County Chapter, which is under the direction of Edward Cesarone. Members in Oakland County number 254.

MEMBERS OF Les Amis du Vin, for \$18 annual dues, receive an attractive wine education magazine, frequent invitations to wine tastings and dinners, a discount Wine of the Month and other benefits designed to create knowledgeable wine connoisseurs.

A free brochure is available upon request from Les Amis du Vin, c/o Cesarone's Wine Bar, 616 Orchard Lake Road, West Bloomfield.



Kathryn Heard plays English girl actress and her father Vaughan Heard portrays an Italian film producer in "A Touch of Spring." The Heards reside in Rochester.

Chekov play added

After Chekov's "The Three Sisters" has been added to the Hilberry Theatre's 1978-79 repertoire, according to an announcement by Leonard Lenore, director of the Washtenaw State University Theatre.

The Chekov play was added to help satisfy a long-felt need, according to Professor Lenore. "The talent we have gathered this season lacks especially good," he said, "and we wanted to provide more roles for them."

THE EXTRA production will not change the performance schedule already announced.

opened Tuesday, Jan. 11. "The Three Sisters" will then play on Wednesday nights, which usually are dark. The Hilberry regularly performs only Thursday through Saturday evenings, except for openings of new productions, which are on Wednesday nights.

The "Three Sisters" also will appear three afternoons on the theater's matinee schedule, which includes Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday matinees.

The 1978-79 repertoire gets under way with two productions held over from last season. "As You Like It" opened Friday and "The Miser" opening Oct. 15.

The new season, which begins in November with Harold Pinter's "The Journey of the Fifth Horse," also includes "The Lion in Winter," (Khalil), "Moby Dick—Rehearsed" and "You Never Can Tell." Complete schedule and ticket information is available from the Tye Koffice in the Hilberry lobby, Cass and Lincoln, Detroit, telephone 577-2972.

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