

Hilarity abounds in 'Lovers'

By ETHEL SIMMONS

"Lovers and Other Strangers," the new production at Somerset Dinner Theatre, is frank, fast and funny. It's the most hilarious show I've seen in a long time.

I laughed out loud often, and the rest of the audience was roaring, too, at the marvelously truthful, comical dialogue about sex and love.

Television personality Hugh Copland (Channel 4's weatherman) stars in the first two of four short plays by Renee Taylor and Joseph Bologna. His performance is vigorous and fast paced.

He gets good comedy support from Theresa Seyferth in scene one and Peggy Thorp in scene two. Ms. Thorp plays his wife in a sequence in the couple's bedroom that is the funniest of the four plays.

JOHNNY AND Wilma (Copland and

Ms. Thorp) are in bed after an evening out, and she is feeling sexy, as she says. He's trying to get some sleep while she's making amorous advances.

Wilma, a voluptuous blonde in a black nightgown, faces the problem of a disinterested husband until they have a fight that brings out some of their hidden conflicts.

They end up with Wilma soothing Johnny with pet names and caresses, while he makes exuberantly funny baby faces.

In scene one, the amorous advances are being made by Jerry, a bachelor (Copland) who has invited Brenda (Ms. Seyferth) back to his apartment. He is smooth but put off. She says, "I don't believe in fooling around till the first time, those are my values." They have met for the first time that night, at Maxwell's Plum.

Gradually, the two overcome their differences and get together.

DINNER THEATER puts you in close contact with the actors on stage, making you feel almost like you're in the same room with the couple on the sofa, or in the bed. This could be somewhat disconcerting, but the audience doesn't seem to mind.

Copland shows his versatility, switching between scene one's determined swinger and scene two's chauvinistic teddy-bear husband. Ms. Seyferth adapts easily from scene one's gypsy-like single to a romantic bride-to-be in scene three and disillusioned young wife in scene four.

James Swartz co-stars in scene three's skit about a prospective bridegroom who nervously wants to back out of the wedding. The comedy exchange is hectic and painfully realistic.

Swartz turns in fine performances, both as Mike, the husband-to-be, and in scene four as Richy, the husband who is ready to divorce his wife after six years.

This last scene has a more serious tone than the other ones but is still amusing. Pierre Turgeon and Ms.

Thorp play the young man's parents, Frank and Bea.

TURGEON is a partner in Turgeon and Lausne Productions, which is presenting the dinner theater show. He gives a solid portrayal of the blue-collar father who can understand "something on the side" but not a divorce.

Ms. Thorp again is in good form as the mother, who tries to console the daughter-in-law with the information that the highest form of love is obligation.

As to "Lovers and Other Strangers" of the title, Turgeon gets to say the lines, "We're all strangers... after a while we become deeper strangers."

This is good fare for dinner theater, where you want a little more than being entertained with a lot of entertainment. The search for love and struggle against loneliness is what all these plays are about.

The dinner theater production is presented each Friday and Saturday evening.

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