

Thursday, October 11, 1979

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More than gags, comedy tackles truth

By HELEN ZUCKER

The Birmingham Village Players has opened its 57th season with a good production of Bernard Slade's "Same Time Next Year."

Directed by Gene Ewald and Assistant Director Helen Shalvey, Slade's comedy comes off as more than a string of gags about a man and a woman who have an improbable affair. There is dignity in this production.

Slade kept Saturday evening's performance on a fine wire; he hit the exact light note that caught the dark undercurrent.

The play runs through Friday and Saturday, Oct. 12 and 13, with an 8:30

p.m. curtain. The playhouse is at Chestnut and Hunter.

The storyline is incredibly simple: A young man sends a young woman a steak "because this place is known for its steaks, not its drinks." Their eyes

meet across a crowded restaurant, an enchanted evening ensues, and the two go on meeting in the same guest cottage once a year for the rest of their lives.

THE YOUNG WOMAN is supposed to be at a nun's retreat (every year, for the rest of her life). The young man is supposed to be doing his first client's tax forms at the same time (every year, for the rest of his life). Who would believe such hogwash?

But wait — this is a play that hangs on the believability of the actors involved, and Ewald has got the best out of his cast of two.

Jayne Lowman gives us a Doris who grows from a confused, giddy girl without a high school diploma into a mature, still sexy, confident grandmother. Ms. Lowman is a remarkably warm, deft actress. She has range.

(I remember her as the tense adolescent in "Wait Until Dark.") And she moves about the stage as if it were her home.

In the space of two acts, we follow Doris' metamorphosis from daffy blonde in 1951 to an avid reader, a Berkeley radical, a businesswoman worth half a million, and finally into a woman who can tell her lover: "The word comfortable has been given a bad name by the young."

We get to know Doris' spouse, Harry, almost as well as we get to know her, as she swaps "bad" and "good" husband-and-wife stories with her once-a-year lover. She values her husband for "continuity, for things shared, for the tenderness in him, even if he's not a good provider."

MS. LOWMAN gives us a Doris, who is, above all, feminine, likable. We believe her ups and downs, her practicality, and her responsiveness to love. Her loyalty to Harry makes us know that she will somehow show up at the same time next year.

Mark Moore as the guilty George is lively, agile, clever.

His wife has "a bell in her head that

tells her where he is every moment." But he loves his wife because she "believed in me enough to marry me."

George is a liar, a CPA who says that nothing works in his life "except figures." He sets his watch 3½ hours ahead "because he got used to it."

By the end of the play, Doris and George are so in sync that she sets her watch the same way. The two help hold each other's marriages together.

Slade's play operates on the premise that most married couples would like an escape valve of such a pleasant sort. But this unmarried pair are "married" in their decency, their confusion about the times they live through, and the

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way they help each other by talking to each other honestly about their "real lives."

In fact, they grow old together, are inextricably tied together by having the weekend to look forward to. They salvage each other's marriages, and we do not condemn them since they are essentially decent, hard-working people.

MOORE'S BEST SCENE is George's bell-bottom phase. George has gone from conservative to "hanging loose." He becomes a piano player after his "weird" (favorite) son is killed in Vietnam. Cliches from Esalam and TA groups roll off his tongue.

He is five years out of sync, not merely 3½ hours. He turns up in bell bottoms in the '70s, long after Doris has given up her headband and Indian skirt phase.

Moore is wonderful when he talks Doris' runaway husband into coming home on the phone. He tells Harry a story about how Doris appreciates him because he's good with her Brownie troop and signs off, calling himself a "Father" at the nun's retreat.



George (Mark Moore) and Doris (Jayne Lowman) are somewhat apprehensive when they first get together in the Birmingham Village

Players production of "Same Time Next Year." (Photo by Elizabeth Carnegie)

Weekend

IN THE SUBURBS

- **Twenny's Cafe** — presents Roger Jamison, with classical piano, every Thursday from 7-9 p.m.; in-town jazz every Friday from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m., with Bess Bonnier and Jack Brokenhsh (trio) on Oct. 12; in-town jazz every Saturday from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. with Ken Box Trio, through Oct. 20, in Birmingham.
- **The School for Scandal** — Richard Brinsley Sheridan's comedy masterpiece opens 14th season for Meadow Brook Theater on Oakland University campus near Rochester. Production runs through Nov. 4. Ticket information at box office, 377-3300.
- **Royal Oak Music Theater** — presents Shawn Phillips, David McKenzie at 8 p.m. Friday, Oct. 12. Ticket information at box office, 547-1555.
- **The Raven Gallery** — coffee house presents Howard Buten as Buf-fo, who combines clowning, mime and music, through Sunday, Oct. 14, in Southfield. Performances at 9:30 p.m. Thursday and Sunday; 9:30 and 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For reservations call 557-2822.
- **Piper's Alley Troy** — presents Katz, upbeat jazz group, from 9 p.m. to 2 a.m. Saturdays. Sunday Brunch starting at 11:30 a.m. with J.A.M.: Jim Dalberg, guitar, and Mike Bellitos, flute; jazz pianist Charles Green and his Quartet from 9 p.m. to 2 a.m. Sundays.

IN DETROIT

- **Attie Theatre** — Lanford Wilson's "5th of July," the story of a group of former student activists together again several years after leaving college, continues through Saturday, Oct. 13. Performances Thursday, Friday and Sunday at 8 p.m.; Saturday at 6 and 9 p.m. For reservations and ticket information phone theater at 963-7789.
- **Top of the Pontch** — Skywalker returns with vocal harmony and dance tunes through Oct. 27 at Hotel Pontchartrain. Dining and dancing music, 8 p.m. to 1 a.m. Tuesday-Thursday; 8:30 p.m. to 1:30 a.m. Friday and Saturday.
- **Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus** — in 108th year through Oct. 21 at Cobo Arena. Three rings of Indian and African elephants; 16 new acts not seen before in America. Ticket outlets: Cobo Arena Box Office, Hudson's, Olympia Travel & Ticket in Birmingham.
- **Detroit Film Society** — presents Greta Garbo in "Ninotchka" ("Garbo laughs!"), plus "Stage Door," Friday and Saturday, Oct. 12 and 13, at main Detroit Public Library. For more information call 833-4048.
- **The Silent Clowns** — silent film series presents "The General" (1926-Buster Keaton), "Why Worry?" (1923-Harold Lloyd) and short "Never Weaken" (1921-Harold Lloyd) at 7 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 14, at Detroit Institute of Arts Auditorium. Ticket office: 832-2730.

Actors enjoy playing Shakespeare

By GAY ZIEGER

"She is my chattel, my horse, my ass, my ox." So says the groom of his bride in Shakespeare's "Taming of the Shrew," being presented by the Will-O-Way Repertory company.

And then, rather than spirit his bride away for their wedding trip, the groom hoists her to his back like a sack of potatoes.

Pretty heady stuff in an era of Kate Millet and Betty Friedan.

Yet the play, considered in context, is not bound to evoke feminist marches, for it is fun and a pleasure to hear and see.

Performances continue at 8:30 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays through Oct. 20 at Will-O-Way Apprentice Theatre in Bloomfield Township.

THE MOOD and tone of the evening was nicely established on Friday's opening night by Celia Merrill Turner,

director since 1949 of this acting trade school. She advised the audience that this production is not intended to compete with similar presentations in the area, for her students needed to "try it before they tried out."

And herein, she added, was the strength of the whole operation, for many of the actors were reading and acting Shakespeare for the first time and many had come to love the bard.

This love was in evidence throughout, as a number of the performers seemed to caress and cherish their lines.

Achieving the most difficult of all, some cast members showed a true understanding of the words.

Perhaps the most notable single performance was given by the shrew herself, Eileen T. Weiss. She was likeable. She displayed an uncommon feistiness and there was energy in her voice, manner and delivery.

One wished at times the shrew had

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not been tamed, becoming subservient, servile and fawning, having traded her independence and spirit for security and material goods. But the disappointment was tempered by Ms. Weiss' grace.

Equally matched to the scolding-tongued woman was Steven R. Pytkonen. He was clamorous and brash, a true swashbuckler with gait and bold swishing hat. Pytkonen had a flair, although in earlier scenes his grimaces were too predictable.

CHRISTINE A. TURNER, as the younger sister who could not marry until the older sister was placed, was pert, proud, filled with a sense of being pretty. Her counterpart, Michael J.

Eddy, was a callow youth who was believably oh-so-in-love.

The father of the two girls, William Feinberg, had an agreeable conversational tone, one that resonated when the part called for it. He obviously brought experience to the role.

Another strong depiction of age complete with teetering and hesitant speech, was given by Harry Loucks.

Steve Lavender, as one of the suitors, had an impressive intensity. He felt the language and looked directly into eyes.

Brett Reynolds, a talented Roper student who played a servant, also was responsible for stage and light design.

In all, the production was good. Costuming by Helen E. King of F. Bruessers added to the authenticity. Physical and mental gymnastics were handled with panache. The actors were well rehearsed. And the audience was allowed to experience theater in the making.

Intermission

Contest asks, 'Do you enjoy horror movies?'

Are you getting tired of horror movies? Or are you a big fan? Whichever, tell us, and explain what it is about these monstrous flicks that turns you on or off.

Your answers will appear just in time for Halloween, in the Thursday, Oct. 25, issue.

Kids and grown-ups are welcome to reply. The five most interesting responses, in the opinion of the Observer & Eccentric staff members serving as judges, will receive Halloween masks. Prizes will be mailed out Monday, Oct. 22.

All entries must be postmarked by Sunday, Oct. 21, or received in the Birmingham office by 9 a.m. Monday, Oct. 22, in order to be considered for the contest.

Clip the attached coupon and pop it in the mail now. Happy haunting!

Intermission

