

'The Deadly Game' provides a delightful scare

By HELEN ZUCKER

The Meadow Brook Theater production of "The Deadly Game" is great entertainment. James Yaffe's novel of Friedrich Durrenmatt's is clever, playful and often brilliant.

The play deals with four old men intent on "staying" alive by practicing "pure law" on unsuspecting visitors. Charles Nolte's direction is sure, elegant, just right. The entire cast rises to the occasion with the result smooth, witty, satisfying theater.

Nolte, who directed "The Caine Mutiny Court-Martial" earlier this season, excels at creating courtroom suspense.

Review

The transitions are so beautifully built in that I found myself holding my breath as the retired lawyers accelerated into a veritable "Saturday Night Fever" of accusations and counter-accusations, arguments about previous cases, and philosophical disquisitions on the nature of crime.

Albert M. Ottenheimer as Emile Carpeau and Humphrey Davis as Bernard Laroque, two old cronies who live

together, set the mood of civilized mayhem immediately. The retired judge and the retired trial lawyer, dressed in tails and gleaming shirt fronts, relish their gourmet meal, rub their hands in anticipation of a "good game," and placate a third old timer, who is all too impatient by the fire.

OTTENHEIMER AND Davis have wonderful timing; they toss lines into the air like time bombs and we shiver — waiting for the blast that will surely go off.

Harry Ellerbe as Joseph Pillet, an arthritic, ex-hangman, is marvelous.

The third member of this household is an ingenious creation. Sitting hunched in his poncho or twisting his black, hangman's blindfold in eager anticipation, he has only to utter an "ah!" or an "oh!" to rivet everyone's eyes.

Ellerbe's grunts are a macabre and hilarious foil to Ottenheimer and Davis' fluent reminiscences of "glorious trials," — trials wherein they have convicted Caesar's wife of murder, cleared Judas of suspicion, and more recently, condemned a mayor.

With enormous gusto, Donald C. Moore plays Gustave Kummer, the bachelor lawyer who visits to take part in "the games" that turn up about once a month. Moore gives us a Kummer who would die if he did not have these chances to give his intellect full rein.

A great, stamping bear of a man, dressed like an Alpine climber who has deigned to put on a silk smoking jacket and court attire, Moore portrays the prosecuting attorney who literally hounds the victim to death.

Pierre now served the judge who once sentenced him. Cullen's wonderfully expressive face suggests worlds of terror.

He is the Incredible Hulk; skulking and smiling he comes and goes like a monstrous bat. He is always in the right place at the right time. His Frankenstein eyes are rapturously mad.

Cheryl Giannini has a trapped, wistful quality as Nicole, the serving girl from the village. Nicole is Pierre's sister; she too has been rescued by the judge. Sent to an asylum to be cured of a breakdown, she asks no questions about the "games" the judge and his friends play.

Nicole is an added twist in the riddles of the play engages us in. Ms. Giannini's remarkable raspy voice serves her role well. Her high tremulous and eerie sparks through the air; her low-pitched, polite parries are filled with desperate fragility.

RICHARD JAMIESON turns in a terrific performance as the pivotal character, the super salesman, Alfredo Traps, who traps himself by the disclosure of his business rise. (The name "Traps" is a bit much. But Durrenmatt's symbolism is usually overdone. Yaffe's adaptation is mercifully long on wit and short on symbols.)

Jamieson plays the confident businessman lost in a snowstorm, the good sport who joins the retired gentlemen for dinner and then throws himself wholeheartedly into their "game."

Given to drink, Traps drinks himself into a talkative mood, and goaded by Kummer, slides slowly downhill to the realization that he is — perhaps — guilty of his former employer's murder. Jamieson's stumped face, the stunned body in the chair, goes unnoticed by the triumphant lawyers congratulating each other on their brilliant arguments.

I will not give away the ending. (Other than to mention Judith Tillman's delightful brief appearance as Mrs. Traps). The epilogue nicely rounds out the doings of these "pure-minded," mad old men. Durrenmatt takes a dim view of human nature. Fortunately this play can be enjoyed without subscribing to the author's views. The sheer fun of watching lawyers and judges do their thing is enough.

The set by Peter-William Hicks is excellent. The wood-paneled, great old house, the portraits of judges, the falling snow through the tall windows creates an atmosphere exactly right for the mood of the play. Lighting by Jean A. Montgomery was equally good.

Cheech and Chong comedy stays dopey through years

By ERIC MOBEY

Back in 1971, when Cheech and Chong released their first album, dopers were covertly taking up in rooms illuminated by black lights and day-glo posters.

Somewhere would slap a Cheech and Chong album on the turntable and people would go into hysterics. The counter-culture had found its own Bob and Ray.

Now, eight years later, the only change seems to be that people are smoking dope everywhere and Cheech and Chong have become millionaires. They are doing basically the same routines, but a whole generation is just now becoming aware of them thanks to the huge success of their film, "Up in Smoke."

THE AUDIENCE For the first of four recent shows at the Royal Oak Music Theater was a mixed bag of all age groups of Cheech and Chong fans. Their performance was what has come to be expected of a C & C concert. Lots of references to drugs and low-level sex jokes abounded, and at this point their act was so predictable that their fans probably disapproved of anything new.

Their jokes were practically the same as I had seen at one of their concerts four years ago. Unfortunately, the same jokes do not carry the same impact as they did in 1975.

Even the costumes were the same and beginning to look quite tacky, but

Review

as long as people are willing to pay \$8.50 to see this type of show, Cheech and Chong seem more than willing to serve up the same brand of humor.

The performance consisted of such characters as Ralph and Herbie, Sister Mary Elephant, Alice Bowie and the Lowrider and his burned-out passenger. These tried and true routines went over well. The concert was a short of greatest hits of Cheech and Chong. From the reaction of the crowd this clearly is what they had come to see.

WHILE OTHER hip comedians have moved on to new material, Cheech and Chong seem to pride themselves on staying the same. Off-stage, they both joke about becoming the Bob Hopes of the drug generation.

In the early days of their act people had different reactions to the drug-laden humor. Parents flipped out. The more sophisticated saw through the satire, but many younger fans formed a misplaced camaraderie with some of the spaced-out characters.

With the success of "Up in Smoke," many of the new fans have fallen into the latter category. Cheech and Chong's popularity seems to rest with the new-found audience and as a result, the quality of their comedy is taking the low road.

Loving Cup opens stay at Hotel Pontchartrain

Loving Cup is appearing through March 31 at the Top of the Pontch in downtown Detroit's Hotel Pontchartrain.

Loving Cup features vocalist Marlene Hill, whose voice has been heard on numerous radio and television commercials. The group plays a variety of music from show tunes and standards to the latest disco on the sales charts.

Danny Jordan, who heads the group, plays acoustical and electric pianos and is chief arranger.

Bass guitarist Venny Pelletier shares the vocal spotlight with Marlene, and

Dale Bender is drummer.

All members of Loving Cup worked extensively throughout Detroit before getting together several years ago. Music begins at 8 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday and 8:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday.

Top of the Pontch is on the 25th floor of the Hotel Pontchartrain, located at Jefferson and Washington Boulevard.

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