

Show needs work but dinner's good

By HELEN ZUCKER

Review

The prime ribs were uncommonly tender at Alvaro's Dinner Theater on opening night Saturday for the Theater of the Arts' production of "Play It Again, Sam."

The evening began with a crisp salad, excellent french dressing, warm rolls, ribs, stuffed Idaho, lime sherbet, and all the coffee you wanted.

However, the young, spirited troupe of actors, directed by Jude Levinson, needed more time to rise to the high level of Woody Allen's marvelous, comic lines. The exceptions were Richard Servis, who seemed to have a grasp of the character of Dick Christie, the man with too many investments, and Walt Frederikson's amusing portrayal of the immortal Bogey.

But the director and rest of the cast seemed to have a limited understanding of the play. The pace was a bit jerky, the timing rough, the transitions, exits and entrances too noticeable.

IN FAIRNESS to the actors, a band and the tromp of discing feet on the dance hall overhead was distracting. Perhaps one of the actors — the Allan Felix character — should have pointed upward as if to say, "See what else I have to live with, on top of all my other anxieties," and managed to incorporate the overhead drumming into the production.

The entire play takes place in a New York apartment where sounds upstairs are quite frequent. Allen's play could never have taken place in a quiet, suburban town.

The cast seemed to have little feeling for the madness of contemporary city life. This play deals with a man trying to be himself in an environment filled with too many stimuli.

Perhaps a few weeks of playing time will add seasoning to this production. The energy, the ambition is certainly there.

Brad Davidson brought a fresh, appealing quality to the role of Allan Felix. Davidson is a very good looking young man with a full head of dark, curly hair. It is difficult to imagine him as a balding, shy, divorced neurotic of 29. He looks like the college junior the entire freshman class yearns after.

I SUSPECT Davidson can act, but he is miscast as Allan, the schlep who cannot get his act together.

Davidson breathes sunny health whenever he bounces onstage. He has a few nice moments, munching popcorn and hugging his Maltese Falcon statue as he watches Bogey send Mary Astor "over" on TV, but it is Davidson watching admiringly that we see.

The Allan Felix character is a movie addict; he is quite lost to the world when watching for the 12th or 15th

time movies he loves. It's what he likes to do, needs to do, more than anything in the world, to the point where his bored wife, who does not share his passion for the screen, leaves him.

The desperation is missing. But Davidson brings a nice guy feeling onto the stage. He's pleasant, winsome, and the lines are a pleasure to listen to. One realizes how good a writer Allen is the more often one hears his lines.

Kathy Kay is a pleasant Nancy and "Eve's Eve" in the cast. Nancy is the wife who has divorced Felix because she "wants to ski down a hill laughing," as Allan puts it. We see the absent Nancy on photo slides. She shoots put-downs that would make a confident man cringe.

IT IS HARD to imagine Ms. Kay, a blonde, robust vision of health, married to the likes of Allan Felix. As the prop girl, Ms. Kay is cute. Her finest moment is her cameo appearance as the new neighbor, a film student, who pops in at the finale.

Michelle M. Poulin turns in a brisk performance as Linda Christie, the beautiful, neglected wife. But the inner trembling of an insecure woman is missing.

The high point of the play, Linda's realization that she really loves and needs her husband as much as he loves her, seems to be a foregone conclusion, rather than a dawning moment of truth.

The one splendid night Linda spends with Allan, a night that changes both their lives for the better, seems rather taken for granted. It lacks the magic contained in important events.

Richard Servis as Linda's husband, Dick Christie, brings a spark to the proceedings whenever he steps onstage. He exudes the jerky nervousness of a man on the make, a man whose mind is ever wheeling and dealing. Servis is believable when he finally stops his mad telephoning and panics at the thought of losing his wife.

AT HIS BEST in his final scene, Servis bends over the stricken Allan, screaming he will kill the man who has taken her away, that he will "cherish and pamper" his wife if only she comes back — and he rushes off like a truly distracted man.

Walt Frederikson, hunched in a navy trenchcoat and dark hat, has got Humphrey Bogart's tough lip down. His lines are delightful, and Frederikson delivers them with snide relish. We never see Frederikson's face, hidden under the hat brim, but the persona comes through in the movements of his shoulders.

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