

Cast finds smooth sailing with 'Best of Friends'

By BARBARA MICHALS

"Best of Friends," the current production by St. Dunstan's Guild of Cranbrook, is a breezy and delightful romantic comedy. The script is sometimes witty, sometimes farcical, and the players are generally polished, and the play is a fun and a pleasure to watch.

The comedy by James Elward will conclude its run this weekend, with performances at 9 p.m. Friday and Saturday at the playhouse in Bloomfield Hills.

As the play opens, the wife and grows children of world-famous writer

review

Archer Connaught (Weston Meyer) has mixed reactions to news of his death in a plane crash. Though he has not seen his family for five years, his son Merrill (Morris Weiner) still idolizes him. His daughter Kate (Mary Elizabeth Bunt-Harlan) despises him, and his wife Josie (Donna Ryder) enjoys plotting the aggrieved widow. The family gets quite a jolt when Connaught suddenly shows up, very

much alive and with a young blonde on his arm. Despite innumerable infidelities in his past, this is the first time the wandering, middle-aged husband has ever asked Josie for a divorce.

ALL SORTS OF complications arise when Josie drops the bombshell that she cannot oblige her husband with a divorce because they have never been legally married. She claims that she hired a fake justice of the peace to perform the ceremony 30 years ago. Donna Ryder is outstanding as Josie and clearly dominates the stage. She plays a beguiling combination of dizzy

dame and sly fox, keeping her adversaries constantly off-balance while she projects unfathomable serenity. Ms. Ryder is unfathomably convincing and does a particularly fine job of using eye movements to advantage.

Weston Meyer is also highly credible as the world-famous, world-weary husband. He is especially appealing when he signs about the burdens of being a philanthropist — perpetually holding his stomach in and worrying about his shape.

Mary Elizabeth Bunt-Harlan is a strident Kate, as sharp-tongued and shrewish as her Shakespearean

namesake. Her distaste for her father's behavior has soured her on all men, but this Kate, too, gets tamed eventually.

AS MERRILL, Morris Weiner is amusing as the has-been flower child who gets easily converted to capitalism. Aimee Hayes is rather listless as Merrill's wife, though she gets some choice lines. Duffy Wineman is the new girl in Connaught's life, an interesting mix of pert and ingenious.

Jim Brooks is marvelous as Felix Hackaday, a mild-mannered, bespectacled corporation lawyer with a buttoned-down mind who finds himself en-

tagled with the Connaughts' problems.

In smaller roles, Mary Anne Wilson and Vincent Hayes deserve special plaudits. Ms. Wilson is sheer perfection as Hazel, Connaught's tough-cooked agent. Hayes is an instant audience favorite with his caricature of a doddering old drunk.

"Best of Friends" is skillfully directed by Nancy Brassier, assisted by Grace Lous. Fritz Fisselmann's one set is strikingly handsome, and the costumes for Ms. Ryder are equally striking.

Spackman heads cast

Terence Kilburn, artistic director of Meadow Brook Theatre, has announced the cast for Emily Williams' chilling murder melodrama "Night Must Fall."

The play will open a four-week run at 8:30 p.m. Thursday on the campus of Oakland University near Rochester.

The killer in "Night Must Fall" is a bellhop named Dan who works in a luxurious resort hotel outside of London. Having decapitated one of the female guests and concealed her body in a refuse pit of a nearby bungalow, he charms his way into the home and onto the payroll of an elderly woman who owns the property where the corpse is concealed.

Even as police search the neighborhood for the body and a Scotland Yard inspector makes daily interrogations at the bungalow, the self-serving Dan is calmly plotting the murder of his aging employer.

MEADOW BROOK actor Tom Spackman portrays Dan, the role originally played by the author of the play. Spackman just completed a run in Meadow Brook's production of "A Life in the Theatre."

Dorothy Blackburn returns to Meadow Brook after a five-year absence to play the role of the elderly woman, Mrs. Bramson. Miss Blackburn has appeared in Meadow Brook productions of "The Front Page," "The Torchbearers," "The Miracle Worker," "Right You Are! If You Think You Are" and "Harvey."

She appeared on Broadway with James Stewart and Helen Hayes in the successful revival of "Harvey" in 1970, followed by a tour with the national company. She was also in the "Hallmark Hall of Fame" version of "Harvey" in 1972.

Miss Blackburn's numerous Broadway appearances include "The Loves of Cass McGuire," "A Desert Incident," "Passage to India" and "Desk Set." She created the role of Doris Upson in "Auntie Mame."

Most recently on Broadway she was with Jane Alexander and Richard Kiley in a revival of "The Heiress."

TELEVISION AUDIENCES have seen her on many network programs. On daytime shows, she has been seen regularly on "The Nurses," "As the World Turns," "The Doctors" and "Another World."

Meadow Brook newcomer Barbara Berge appears as the old lady's niece who is both attracted and repelled by the killer. On Broadway Miss Berge appeared in "The Norman Conquests." Last season she created the role of Turner in "Pay the Man" at the Royal Court Theatre in her native London.

Returning Meadow Brook actors in the cast include Mary Pat Gleason, Donald W. Dailey, George Gittio, Lori Donley and Marianne Mullerleile.

"Night Must Fall," under the direction of Terence Kilburn, features a single setting by Douglas Wright, with costumes by Mary Lynn Bonelli and lighting by Benjamin F. Levenberg.

Performances for the week of "Night Must Fall," which runs through April 20, are at 8:30 p.m. Thursday and Friday, 2 and 8:30 p.m. Saturday and 6:30 p.m. Sunday.

THE FOLLOWING THREE weeks offer performances at 8:30 p.m. Tuesdays-Fridays, and 9:30 p.m. Saturdays, 8:30 p.m. Sundays and 2 p.m. Wednesdays.

The theater is dark Mondays. Tickets may be purchased at Hudson's or by calling the Meadow Brook Theatre box office, 377-3300.

Following its final performance at Meadow Brook, "Night Must Fall" will begin a tour of 11 Michigan communities under the auspices of the Michigan Council for the Arts. These communities include Battle Creek (April 24-26), Muskegon (April 27), Whitehall (April 29), Traverse City (April 30), Chubbagan (May 1), Escanaba (May 2-3), Alpena (May 6), Manistee (May 7), Alpena (May 9), Midland (May 10) and Brighton (May 11).

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2x8	4 ⁵⁶	5 ⁷⁰	8 ⁴⁰	8 ⁹⁶	10 ⁰⁸	12 ⁰⁹	16 ¹²
2x10	5 ⁸⁷	7 ³⁸	11 ¹⁶	13 ⁴⁷	14 ⁸¹	17 ²¹	19 ¹¹
2x12	10 ⁴⁴	13 ⁰⁵	15 ⁶⁶	18 ²⁷	20 ⁸⁸	27 ⁰⁶	30 ⁶⁹
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