

Lunch 'n' Theatre has fun with British humor

By ETHEL SIMMONS

review

Jimmy Launce's production of "Good Evening," presented at Saks Fifth Avenue's new Lunch 'n' Theatre, is a lively enough show but one that would go over better with a nighttime audience.

"Good Evening" seems designed to spark laughter from an audience winding down the day's tensions with irreverent comedy.

Tall John Powers and shorter Fred Buchalter pair their talents for the sketches in this revue of British humor by Peter Cook and Dudley Moore.

Powers has a leading-man handsomeness and a way of delivering his

lines forthrightly. Buchalter is a good-looking young man, with a mop of black hair, who looks more your average man and performs with a naturalness that makes it appear he's not acting.

Jack Grukke directed the production, which continues Wednesdays through May 21 in the lower-level auditorium at Somerset Mall, Troy.

SKETCHES RANGE from fast blackout to longer ones sustaining

character and mood. Timing is almost everything in presenting the material at its best, and Powers and Buchalter do a fairly good job.

Their accents sound reasonably English, varying with the personalities ranging from coal miner to nobleman. A few of the sketches border on the hilarious, some are mildly amusing, others downright dull.

The show starts off briskly with "Hello," about two men who meet on the street and recall old times. Absolute strangers to each other, they manage to pick up each other's cues, carrying on a polite, presentable conversation.

Wittiest of the sketches is "The Frog

and the Peach" where Buchalter interviews Powers who portrays the owner of a restaurant called the Frog and the Peach.

The dialogue is absurd and clever. The two men pace this nonsense with just the right tone.

"Mini Drama" casts Powers as an Englishman of the privileged class, on his way to speak in the House of Lords. He climbs into a cab driven by Buchalter, an outspoken, hostile cab driver.

In the invisible cab the narrative builds to a dramatic intensity, with the men contrasting the differences in their lives, through a startling conversation.

THE AUDIENCE of women reacted with amusement and understanding to a switch on "Tea for Two." Two men discuss over tea an article written by feminist Germaine Greer. "Ladies should label their erogenous zones" is one of the suggestions from Buchalter, as a puzzled male when it comes to satisfying women.

Other sketches — about a successful film star who visits his aged father; a coal miner who is an aspiring, bad writer; and a reporter interviewing a shepherd who saw the Star of Bethlehem — all have potential but never really get off the ground in this production.

Some of the revue's more racy lines

are hurried over and need a fun-oriented nighttime crowd to turn them into laugh lines.

THE BUFFET luncheon menu provided by Alfred's is superb. Mix-your-own spinach salad and other relishes are followed by hot dishes including chicken and mushroom crepes and quiche lorraine. An accompaniment of zucchini, mushrooms and celery is a tasty hot vegetable choice. Dessert includes New York cheesecake — yum.

Tables are set for four, dimly lit with candles, providing an elegant, informal atmosphere. Fashions from Saks are modeled during lunch before the show.

Meriwether's opens doors

Meriwether's Restaurants have come to the Detroit area, and with them a little bit of England.

Sporting a distinctive British theme and decor, Meriwether's opens its first restaurant Wednesday at 2545 Telegraph, north of 10 Mile Road, in Southfield.

A second Meriwether's restaurant is scheduled to open June 3 in Warren.

Based in Troy, Meriwether's Restaurants represents an expansion of Canada's Crock & Block restaurants. Crock & Block has opened 21 restaurants in Ontario over the last seven years, the most recent in Windsor.

Meriwether's President Frederick D. Montgomery describes the new restaurants as part of a growing trend toward "casual menu dinner houses."

"AS SUCH," says Montgomery, "Meriwether's does not specialize in any single category of food but instead attempts to appeal to a broader range of lifestyles and age groups by offering a greater variety of menu items — all at moderate prices."

On a sign outside the Southfield restaurant, a black derby with a daisy in its red band (the Meriwether's logo) is tipped toward the Tudor-style building. The restaurant exterior is complete with turret, the inside houses the Tower Dining Room.

Meriwether's has five other dining rooms of various sizes (Master, Greenhouse, Wine Cellar, Den and Library), as well as a large bar-lounge area. Total seating capacity is approximately 250.

Each dining area is furnished with turn-of-the-century antiques, most of them imported from England. Meriwether's waiters and waitresses are costumed in English-style clothing, the bartenders attired in vests and bowties.

Casual items on Meriwether's menu (both luncheon and dinner) include quiche and crepes (\$3.50-\$4.50), omelettes (\$3.50-\$3.85) and specialty salads (\$2.25-\$3.99). Sandwiches, seasoned burgers and three Mexican dishes are among the lunch selections, which range from the French Dip at \$3.50 to Soup and Seafood Salad at \$4.95.

DINNER ENTREES (which include a salad, fresh breads, rice or potato and a vegetable) range from British Steak and Kidney Pie at \$5 to the New York strip at \$10.95. Other dinners include a Crab and Chicken Crock (\$8.75), San Francisco Stir Fry (\$6.50), Broiled Lamb Chops (\$8.75 for three) and Prime Rib (\$9.50).

"We've put an emphasis on natural, fresh foods, which should appeal to lighter eaters, and we bake our own breads daily right at the restaurant," Montgomery said. "We also offer a wide selection of house wines and other special drinks, a separate dessert menu and a children's menu."

Another feature at Meriwether's is late-night snacks. The restaurant offers its luncheon menu until midnight six nights a week.

Meriwether's is open from 11 a.m. to midnight Monday-Thursday, 11 a.m. to 1 a.m. Friday-Saturday, and 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Sunday.

'Charlie Chaplin' appears on scene

When Meriwether's opens its first Detroit-area restaurant Wednesday in Southfield, it will be a dual birthday celebration — one for Meriwether's and one for Charlie Chaplin.

The late English comedian, born April 16, 1889, will have felt right at home at the new Meriwether's restaurant with its British theme and decor.

Consequently, in honor of Chaplin's birthday, Meriwether's will feature Gary DeVar of the Oakland Mime Ensemble appearing as Chaplin on Monday and Tuesday at the restaurant, 2545 Telegraph, north of 10 Mile Road.

DeVar will appear from 6:30-9:30 p.m. Monday at a Meriwether's benefit dinner for the American Cancer Society, metropolitan Detroit area, and from 6-9 p.m. Tuesday at a special pre-opening reception.

In further observance of Chaplin's birthday, Meriwether's will show old Chaplin movies continuously throughout both evenings.

Academy Singers giving OU concert

The Academy of Popular Vocal Arts will present a free performance of The Academy Singers, a jazz and show choir, at 3 p.m., April 19, in Varner Hall on the Oakland University campus near Rochester.

The academy is a continuous high school workshop situation, designed to present opportunities for young singers to participate in professional and learning experiences.

This year's traveling group features 24 singers and dancers who represent 16 different high schools in 13 different communities.

Area residents in the choir include: from Birmingham — Lynn Pruss, Dan Watson; Bloomfield Hills — Rob Mayo; Farmington Hills — Michelle Paris; Rochester — Susan Powell, and Troy — Jonathan Irvine and Cassie Selfers.

Students of the Academy of Popular Vocal Arts have recorded three albums and have performed numerous concerts throughout the United States. They most recently appeared in performance at the 1980 Eastern Division ACDA Convention in New York City.

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