

# Life goes on comically for 'Chapter Two' couples



Jimmy Launce (right) is surrounded by Patricia Carozzo (left), Jack Gruke and Laura Levine-Niesen.

By ETHEL SIMMONS

Jimmy Launce, the radio personality behind the Somerset Dinner Theatre, heads the capable cast of four in Neil Simon's "Chapter Two," about marriage, death and divorce.

This time Simon has used events in his own life to tell of George Schneider (Jimmy Launce), a man uncomfortably on his own after his beloved wife dies.

Hal Youngblood directed the neat production, which is presented Friday and Saturday nights and at Wednesday matinees in the lower-level auditorium at Somerset Mall in Troy.

It's a comedy with more serious overtones than Simon's earlier works. This makes the play both less gag-ridden and more human, although the second act suffers from characters who overanalyze themselves.

## review

LAUNCE HAS a good, resonant voice and clear enunciation. His timing is unhurried, and he assuredly presents a once-confident guy at loose ends, trying to get his life together again.

One half of the stage is Schneider's lower Central Park West apartment, its bold style set by geometric artwork; the other half is the apartment of Jennifer Malone (Patricia Carozzo) on New York's upper East Side.

Ms. Carozzo deftly displays the sensitivity and confusion of a recently divorced, very attractive, intelligent woman. She's a fine match for the lonely Schneider, who accidentally phones her and finds that they hit it off.

Schneider's brother Leo (Jack Gruke) and Faye Medwick (Laura Levine-Niesen) also fence nicely in the subplot. Leo's both the matchmaker, who leaves Jennie's phone number with George, and the errant husband, who makes a practice of making love to willing, preferably unromantic women.

Faye, a wife disappointed with her sex life, plots an affair with Leo but gets turned off by his businesslike off-hand approach to their romance, as well as his too-practiced sweet talk.

PLAYWRIGHT SIMON manages to show the unhappy, disillusioned side of marriage at the same time we're laughing at Faye and Leo's verbal jousting.

Gruke and Ms. Levine-Niesen are at their comic best in the seduction scene. He's fast-talking and she's tough-talk-

ing but both are vulnerable.

Launce and Ms. Carozzo make the most of the first act routines where they have animated, crazy telephone conversations and pursue the love affair that quickly turns into marriage.

In the second act, the fast marriage turns sour, as the couple reassesses their commitment. The plot turns seem to come almost too abundantly, the characters sorting out their true feelings. This is the only area where the action lags.

All the characters are well cast: The still boyish-looking Launce, in his trim-fitting suits and designer sweaters; the soft-haired, pretty Ms. Carozzo; the lanky, dark-haired, mustached Gruke; and snappy, attractive Ms. Levine-Niesen (who got a responsive hand from the audience at curtain call).

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