

Realistic touch adds to humor

By BARBARA MICHALS

Mid-life crises form the comic backbone of "Finishing Touches," the Jean Kerr romantic comedy currently offered by St. Dunstan's Guild of Cranbrook. Convincing performances and a strong sense of truth mark the production.

"Finishing Touches" concludes this weekend with performances at 9 p.m. Friday and Saturday at the St. Dunstan's Guild Playhouse in Bloomfield Hills.

The domestic comedy unfolds with a rather typical American family sitting around the breakfast table talking at each other but not communicating.

Husband Jeff (Weston Meyer) is an English professor at the local university who suddenly finds himself restless and confused because of recurrent fantasies about a sweet young thing in his poetry seminar.

WHEN HE CONFIDES in his wife Katy (Maggie Bennett), she feels as if her secure world has been shaken by an earthquake. Further tremors occur when her oldest son (John Shirik) comes

review

home from college with his live-in girlfriend (Dawn Daniels).

Acting upon the advice of a family friend (Garvin Bawden Jr.), Katy encourages her husband to have an affair with his student and get his fantasies out of his system. This is more than Jeff bargained for.

Maggie Bennett does an outstanding job of capturing Katy's heartache and confusion as she struggles to maintain her outward calm. Her frequent soliloquies provide some amusing insights into her own frustrations and fantasies. Weston Meyer is equally convincing as the restless husband, beset by such domestic irritations as cups and saucers that don't match, household items frequently left where they ought not to be and the nerve-racking thumps of his son's basketball.

John Shirik is agreeable as oldest son Steve, the Harvard senior who admits to his mother that he has given up

church-going in exchange for the New Morality.

BRAD SCOTT and Pat Brooks are pleasing as the younger children, high school senior Kevin and 11-year-old Hughie, who add their share to the domestic chaos.

Fred, the family friend who is himself the veteran of many unsuccessful marriages, is played by Bawden with delightful cynicism. Both Bawden and Meyer appear older than the dialogue specifies, a small detail that director Felicia Nowak Shirik might easily have amended in the script.

Dawn Daniels' precise enunciation makes her believable as Felicia, Steve's actress girlfriend. A personable girl whom most of the family take to immediately, Felicia turns out to be more of a threat to family unity than Jeff's poetry student.

As Elsie, the object of Jeff's yearnings, Barbara Cliff is engagingly sweet

and wholesome, far from the "femme fatale" Katy feared.

"Finishing Touches" is filled with choice comedy lines, but its greatest strength lies in the ordinariness of its characters and their recognizable dilemmas. The fine St. Dunstan's cast provides firm support for the play's domestic realism.

AS ALWAYS, St. Dunstan's provides a handsome, realistic set for its production. Saturday night's performance was marred only by difficulties with lighting cues. Also, it would be preferable not to let actors sit on the floor of the stage as St. Dunstan's seats are not set on a slope and thus vision becomes a problem.

"Finishing Touches" is produced by Ellen Gascoigne and Mary Ann Wilson, with Debbie Cragin assisting director Shirik. With two intermissions the show runs a bit long, but it's pleasantly entertaining throughout.

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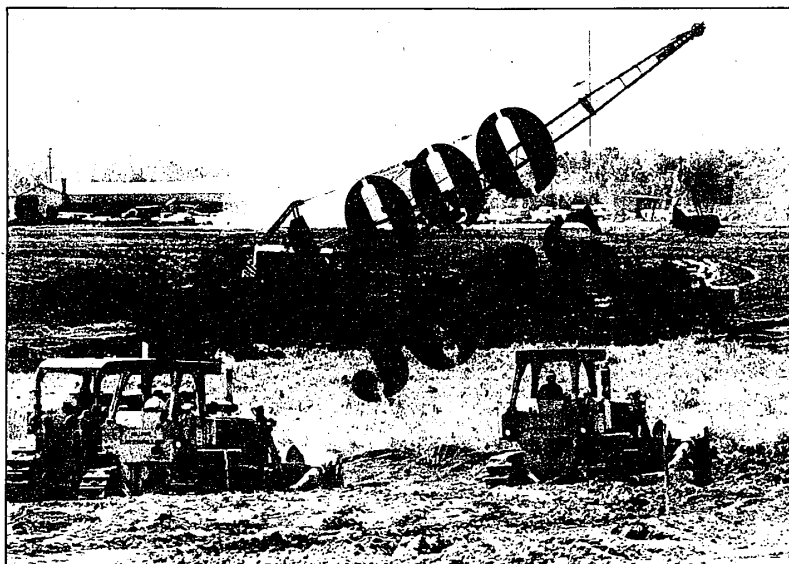
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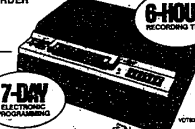
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