

# Actors struggle with tired play

Performances of the Avon Players production of "Critic's Choice," comedy by Ira Levin, continue Friday-Sunday and Feb. 12-13 at the Avon Players theater, 1185 Washington, Avon Township. Curtain time is 8 p.m. Fridays-Saturdays, 7:30 p.m. Sunday. Tickets at \$4 may be reserved by calling 656-1130.

By Gay Zieger  
special writer

What happens when an acerbic theater critic faces the possibility of having to review his wife's first play — a real abomination? Nothing of great consequence, at least not in Ira Levin's "Critic's Choice" at the Avon Players theater.

One would expect a mighty clash but as in T.S. Eliot's feared view of the world's end, there was more of a whimper than a bang. Oh, the characters squared off on occasion and, much to the surprise of the audience, grew to rather vehement in one father-son confrontation which was scarcely credible because of a lack of preparation.

But many they agonized and

searched their consciences and engaged in simmering self-pity.

The actor tried to pull the thing off. But the play should have been buried in the '60s, along with the miniskirt, which characterized the latter half. It's a wonder the play stood up even then. It is sexist and not all that funny. And while women folk were expected to find contentment in heart and home, none were asked to tolerate bullying and ego-detracting.

She won't finish the play, says the critic husband, because she never even completed that scatter rug last summer. Indeed.

IN ADDITION, the premise is absurd. Considering that conflict of interest is not a new concept, this is a straw horse. The dilemma, to pan or not to pan, is just a fabrication of the playwright's mind.

Also, it is doubtful that a woman would so denigrate her husband's profession, his life work, as to ask him to prove his love by giving her a favorable review. To love, honor and lie?

And the husband's unwillingness to pass the assignment on to a colleague

seems nothing more than some ploy to keep the play going for two hours. Both would know that critics need to be objective. That's the name of the game.

Now, on to the performance. The actors lacked a motivating principle, wavering between slapstick and high drama. Sometimes the audience didn't know whether to laugh or cry, and most times neither seemed appropriate nor worth the effort.

Individually, each performer had his day. Not one was really all that bad, and a couple did what they set out to do.

JOYCE CONTRUCCI as the mother-in-law was funny, tough, lovable and gave the play an otherwise-lacking sense of movement by just being on stage.

The young son, Mike Aumock, also added life and humor. His clowning was totally in keeping with his character. He enjoyed being a cut-up.

Bruce Gellach as the oddball director was hard to fathom at first. His jerky movements, complete with backside swivels, were silly enough to draw laughter. But questions had to arise

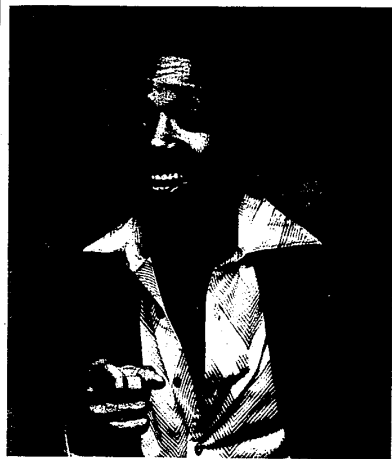
about whether he was dopey, dramatic or effeminate.

Not until later do we learn that he was probably all three — and lecherous. Gellach recognized the good lines, though, and he played them to the hilt.

Ginny de Steiger as the budding playwright handled her character well, given the pull between the wife's self-sufficiency and dependency. Just as her co-star was asked to condescend, bluster and eventually dominate, she needed to be brittle, rebel, and eventually have babies.

JOHNNIE REYNOLDS as the former wife had an easier job. She needed to be a mothering seductress, and conveyed that image nicely.

Paul Nash as the critic was vaguely disappointing, but mostly because his voice promises so much. It has a marvelous timbre and resonance, and Nash plays with it wonderfully. Unfortunately, some of his lines should have been muffled. To borrow his character's most insightful observation: "I've done my job; my readers have been warned."



Ron Douglas is in the spotlight this weekend at Comedy Capers at Stafford's in West Bloomfield.

## upcoming things to do

### ● SWEET ADELIN

The championship Farmington Hills Sweet Adeline Chorus will offer its four-part harmony style of barbershop singing in a Cabaret Show Friday-Saturday at the Armenian Congregational Church on 12 Mile Road in Southfield. The show includes guest performances by the Aire Males, a men's barbershop quartet, and the championship Detroit No. 1 men's barbershop chorus. Tickets at \$8 include the show and a buffet afterward. For more information call 427-5572.

### ● 'DAMN YANKEES'

Troy Players has group prices available for senior citizens groups, block clubs, PTAs or other organizations that would like to attend performances of the players musical "Damn Yankees." The show runs Feb. 26-28 and March 5-6 at the Troy Community Center. Wheelchairs are easily accommodated, according to the ticket sales representative. For details call 879-1285.

### ● MERRIE MELODIE

The movie musical "The King and I" starring Yul Brynner continues through Feb. 21 at the Merrie Melodie Theatre, Meadowbrook Village Mall, Walton at Adams, in Avon Township. For showtimes call 375-0011.

### ● CAFE FIOR

Prodigy, with original and popular rock music, will open Wednesday at the Cafe Fior, 29121 Northwest Highway, Southfield. Show time is 9:30 p.m. to 2 a.m. through Feb. 13.

### ● DINNER THEATER

The Alpha-Omega Repertory Theatre will present Leonard Gershe's comedy "Butterflies Are Free" in a dinner-theater production Wednesday at the Orchard Ridge Campus of Oakland Community College in Farmington Hills. Dinner begins at 6:30 in Turrell Hall and the show follows at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$11 per person. Senior citizens 65 and older will be charged \$9.00 students \$8. For reservations or additional information call 476-9400, ext. 500 and 501.

### ● SHOW TRYOUTS

Tryouts for the AAUW Children's Theatre spring play "Puss and Boots" will be held at 1 p.m. Tuesday at the home of Dorothy Decker, 214 Clifton, Birmingham. The children's theater, which has been providing a community program for 29 years, is continually looking for new members. Non-AAUW members may join. For more information about the tryouts call Mrs. Decker at 647-0180.

### ● BENEFIT NIGHT

The Shrine High School Mothers Club is sponsoring a benefit performance of the three-act comedy "Absence of a Cello" at 7:30 p.m. Sunday at St. Dunstan's Playhouse, 400 Lone Pine, Bloomfield Hills. The ticket price of \$7.50 per person includes an afterglow immediately following the performance. Tickets may be reserved by calling Nancy Walker at

398-8854, Ginny Gamber at 545-7751, Marguerite Phillips at 548-0195 or Mary Lou Reaume at 545-7663.

### ● COMEDY STAR

Ron Douglas, comedy star from the Pointer Sisters and Manhattan Transfer shows, will perform at 8:45 and 10:45 p.m. (two shows) Friday-Saturday at Comedy Capers at Stafford's, Maple and Orchard Lake roads, in Orchard Mall, West Bloomfield. For reservations call 851-8952.

### ● RAG-A-MUFFIN PLAYERS

Robert Louis Stevenson's classic story "Treasure Island" will be staged by the Rag-A-Muffin Players from 1-2 and 3-4 p.m. at The Community House, Bates and Townsend, Birmingham. Tickets at \$2 are available at The Community House, phone 644-5832. The production is part of the Children's Show Series.

### ● SYMPHONY RESCHEDULED

The West Bloomfield Symphony Orchestra's performance Sunday, Jan. 31, was canceled because of snow and has been rescheduled for 7:30 p.m. Sunday at the West Bloomfield Auditorium, 4925 Orchard Lake Road (at Green Road). Felix Remick will conduct a "Valentine Special." For more information call the orchestra office at 626-1560.

### ● COMEDY CASTLE

Paul Mooney, from "The Buddy Holly Story" and The Comedy Store, continues through Saturday at the Comedy Castle at Maximilian's in Royal Oak. Showtime is tonight, 8:30 and 11 p.m. (two shows) Friday-Saturday. For more information call 549-2323.

### ● GLEASON LOOK-ALIKE

A metropolitan-Detroit search is on for a 10-year-old Jackie Gleason look-alike to appear in an upcoming motion picture "The Toy." Five Detroit-area Toys-R-Us stores will be the site for a photographic session from 10 a.m. to noon Saturday. Among participating stores are those at 27000 Telegraph in Southfield and 29150 Seven Mile Road in Livonia. Photos of youngsters standing next to a life-size cutout of Jackie Gleason will be taken and forwarded to Columbia Pictures in Hollywood.

### ● EAGLE THEATRE

Jazz guitarist Angelo Primo and Company will perform in concert at 7:30 p.m. Saturday at the Eagle Theatre "Live," 13 S. Saginaw, Pontiac. Primo also will appear every Friday through Feb. 19 when Open Forum presents comedy in "Mardi Gras on Suburban Street" at the Eagle Theatre. For more information phone 335-5470.

### ● TODD RUNDGREN

"An Evening with Todd Rundgren," featuring music and video, will be presented at 7:30 p.m. Sunday at the Royal Oak Music Theatre. Tickets at \$11 are available at all CTC Outlets.

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When Elaine spies a second corpse in the old tenement, the police distrust her as just another bored, hysterical housewife. Her husband (C.M. Novess III) seems anxious to shut her off to a psychiatric clinic in Switzerland, while Elaine seems to be deliberately surrounding Elaine with reminders of her first husband's death.

MS. ELLIOTT is a convincing neu-

rotic, chain-smoking, wringing her hands compulsively, absently running her hands through her hair. Nothing prepares the viewer for the reserves of strength Elaine eventually calls upon, but that fault seems more in the script than in the acting.

As the supposedly solicitous husband, Novess is off his calm. His arrogance to the mad, disdain for the neighbors and impatience with his wife makes him a character one loves to hate.

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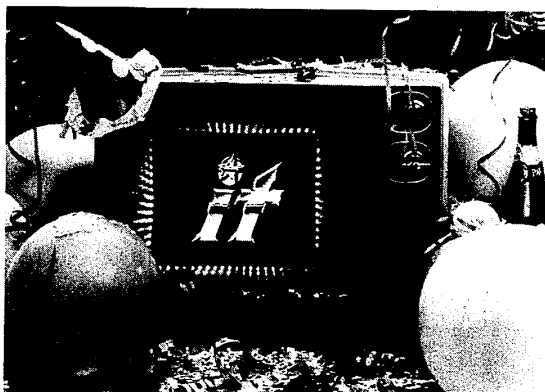
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## 'Absence of a Cello' plays at St. Dunstan's Theatre

St. Dunstan's Guild of Cranbrook, celebrating its 50th anniversary year, will present the three-act comedy "The Absence of a Cello" Friday and Saturday and Feb. 11-13.

Performances will be at St. Dunstan's Theatre on Lone Pine Road, west of Woodward Avenue. A benefit performance was held Wednesday and two more benefits are scheduled at 7:30 p.m. Sunday and 8 p.m. Feb. 11. Other cast members are at 9 p.m. Feb. 11. All seats are reserved by calling 644-

0527.

"Absence of a Cello" is about a psychiatrist who needs money badly he turns to a high-salary job offered by a large corporation and suffers through "corporate image" problems. The play was first presented on Broadway in September 1964.

The cast included Bill Everon, Nancy Scott, Liz Brooks, Barbara CHT, Margie Brooks, Tom Christopher and Mark Waters. The show was directed by Florence Brown.