

Thursday, March 3, 1983 O&E

(T,S,F,Mo-Su)O7C



STEPHEN CANTRELL/staff photographer

Living and loving

Jayne Lowman as Teresa Phillips, Skip Pobst (center) as her husband Bob and Jerry McKoon as William rehearse a scene from the British comedy "How the Other Half Loves," by Alan Ayckbourn. The play focusing on the lives of four couples will be presented by the Birmingham Village Players on Friday-Sunday and the same days the weekend of March 11 at the play-

house on the corner of Hunter and Chestnut streets. Also in the cast are Robert Bowes as Frank and his real-life wife, Joan Bowes, playing his wife Fiona Foster; and Donna Snyder as William's wife, Mary Detweiler. Tickets at \$4 are available at the door, but reservations are recommended. For reservations call 644-2075.

There's nothing of note in musical production

Performances of the Birmingham Theatre production of the musical "They're Playing Our Song" continue through March 27 at the theater, 211 S. Woodward. The production is directed by Peter B. Mumford. For further information, call the box office at 644-3533.

By Helen Zucker
special writer

Sigh. After absorbing theater like "Nuts," the Birmingham Theatre, management seems to think we need a dose of low-energy Neil Simon and a bunch of Marvin Hamlisch's highly forgettable songs. Both Simon and Hamlisch have written far better works than "They're Playing Our Song." Simon has cracked me up many times, and I have a high regard for the score of "Chorus Line" and "The Way We Were" (both Hamlisch works), but "They're Playing Our Song" is a collaboration that should've ended up in the shredder.

Let me give lyricist Carole Bayer Sager her due while I'm at it. Except for the title song, her lyrics are on a par with the rest of this sorry attempt to build a play about a relationship between a musician and a lyricist. Perhaps Simon and Hamlisch have gotten too bankable if backers are more than willing to plow money into this fluff.

LARRY KERT as Vernon Gersch, the successful musician who acts as if he's a college sophomore, and Marsha Skaggs as Sonia Walsk, a successful lyricist, haven't got a successful chemistry going between them (the only thing that might possibly have added a bit of believability to their eternal departures and reconciliations). We know at a glance that they are people who would walk past each other at a party, and they never do anything to change our minds. Sonia is supposed to be poor at the beginning (she lives on W. 18th



Larry Kert is Vernon Gersch and Marsha Skaggs is Sonia Walsk — songwriters who shush each other when they hear the band playing their song in the musical "They're Playing Our Song" at the Birmingham Theatre.

review

Street), and Vernon is rich, having made it to the 14th floor of the building Leonard Bernstein lives in, even though he's afraid of heights. The running gag about Sonia's clothes (she dresses in outfits she gets from friends who've done plays or commercials) isn't really funny, since she's been dressing in costumes since she attended Middlebury College and looks better in them than she does in the fashionable "real clothes" she buys herself when she "matures" at the finale. It gets dull since we can see it coming with each scene. Simon's fa-

mous one-liners misfire throughout. It's just an unfunny show-biz play about two unbelievable people. I got very tired of hearing the word "relationship."

THE JAZZY SETS, echoing the zigzag shapes of the firescapes and skyscrapers, and the Jaguar echoing the headline scene in "West Side Story" were fine. So was Roy Miller's one line as the Voice of Phil the Engineer.

I was glad we never got to meet Leon, who plays the largest role in this triangle that works out happily. Dunno what to say about the energetic dancers. They look like kids who are practicing to get out of the car-hop business. The best three seconds belong to Johnny Mathis. Alas, he isn't in this show. We hear his voice on tape all too briefly.

Dance theater presents performance

The Oakland Dance Theatre will present "Frankie and Johnny" and "The New Dress," plus other dance works, at 8:30 p.m. Friday-Saturday, March 11-12, and 2:30 p.m. March 12-13 on the Oakland University campus near Rochester.

The dance theater is part of the Department of Theatre and Dance at O.U. Tickets are \$4 general admission and \$3 for students and senior citizens. Ticket information is available by calling 377-2000.

"Frankie and Johnny" is a modern jazz narrative based upon the popular song of the 1930s. "The New Dress," taken from a story by Virginia Woolf, concerns the insecurities of a middle-aged woman as she struggles with her desire to assert herself, to fight her own irreversible pattern of self destruction.

ANOTHER WORK on the program is called "Skit-Dat-De-Dat," a light-hearted look at modern-day anxiety

overload. It is set to Dixieland jazz with a cast of 20.

Janice Bourdage of Minneapolis will be featured guest artist with the Oakland Dance Theatre at these performances. Bourdage recently was a member of the Bill Evans Dance Company in Seattle and now works as an independent dancer and choreographer at the EXACT Dance Workshop.

She will present a new solo entitled "Drift" to an original score by Scott Iverson.

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