

Dinner theater romps with bedroom farce

review

"Any Wednesday," comedy by Muriel Resnik, continues through May at Somerset Dinner Theatre in Somerset Mall, Troy. Performances are Fridays-Saturdays, with cocktails at 7 p.m., dinner at 7:30 and curtain at 8:45; matinee luncheon theater at noon Wednesdays. Evenings are priced at \$18.95 per person including tax and gratuity; matinees at \$13.95 per person. For reservations call Alfred's restaurant at 643-8865.

By Barbara Michals
special writer

Is love tax-deductible? A prominent business executive tries to make it so, and some funny complications ensue, in "Any Wednesday," the beguiling bedroom farce now playing at Jimmy Launee's Somerset Dinner Theatre. Wealthy executive John Cleves (L. Ron Gillispie) keeps his mistress (Mary Whiting) tax deductible by listing her as his company's "executive suite." The site turns sour when Cleves' new secretary mistakenly assumes the place really is for corporate visitors and sends over both an out-of-town businessman and Cleves' wife. Arriving first, the businessman (Danny Hicks) sniffs a chance to blackmail the ruthless Cleves and sticks around long enough to become hopelessly entangled in the plot to deceive Mrs. Cleves (Pat Varga). The latter is bent on rede-

corating the tacky apartment and being hospitable to the young couple she finds occupying the place.

EVENTUALLY All the deceptions collapse, the characters realign, and the arrogant Cleves gets his comeuppance. Meanwhile the audience has a thoroughly good time with this light-hearted romp.

Gillispie gives balance to Cleves so that he's more than just a caricature of an overzealous businessman. Gillispie's Cleves shows a sincere and tender affection for the women in his life, though his conceit, self-absorption and overbearing competitiveness are never far from the surface. Gillispie does a self-satisfied smirk to perfection, and his predatory smile is wonderful in the parlor-game scene.

As Ellen, Cleves' once-a-week mistress, Mary Whiting is as bubbly as the champagne she guzzles whenever the going gets tough. With her rosy cheeks and beribboned hair, Whiting radiates wholesomeness and appealing, misguided innocence. Clearly, she looks more at home in slacks and sloppy shirt than in the flowing pink negligee Cleves has given her.

Hicks is thoroughly believable as Cass, the earnest young Midwestern businessman who is horrified by Cleves' tactics, both personal and professional. Cleves has swallowed up Cass' family business and closed it for a tax loss. Cass wants to blackmail Cleves into relenting, but his integrity won't let him go through with the maneuver.

PAT VARGA IS likable as Dorothy, Cleves' sensible, very adaptable wife of many years. A bit of an opportunist in her own right, Dorothy cleverly manages to make the best of a difficult situation and turn it to her advantage.

Under director Robert Jordan, all of the players perform smoothly. Pacing is never a problem but is not as tightly tuned in some spots as in others.

The pre-show dinner buffet by Alfred's restaurant currently features an interesting but very dry Chinese-style chicken dish and tasty stuffed beef rolls. A variety of salads includes macaroni shells with crabmeat. The buffet also features fettuccine alfredo, rolls, green beans and carrot cake.



Ron Gillispie (left), Mary Whiting, Pat Varga and Danny Hicks appear in "Any Wednesday," a comedy by Muriel Resnik at Somerset Dinner Theatre in Troy.

'Cat on a Hot Tin Roof' sizzles at Avon Players

review

Performances of the Avon Players production of Tennessee Williams' drama "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" will be presented at 8 p.m. Fridays-Saturdays and 7:30 p.m. Sundays through March 28 at the Avon Players Theater, 1185 Washington Road, Avon Township.

By Gay Ziegler
special writer

Tennessee Williams' "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" is a festering, malignant, cancerous little portrait of human misery and decay. So who needs it? A night out is supposed to help dim the memory of the 9 o'clock news.

But, aficionados of drama should happily forego escapism. The Avon Players, under the sure-handed direction of Bill Doehring, portrays hateful-

The play's setting and time span are limited: a single bedroom, a single day — the birthday of the family patriarch, Big Daddy.

In that bedroom, shared in name only by Linda Hurd as Maggie and Curt Miner as Brick, we learn of contractual celibacy, alcoholism and possibly homosexuality. We learn early on that the couple are not on good terms. Says one, "We are not married. We are not living together. We are sharing the same cage."

HURD AND MINER convey this venom marvelously well. Miner evokes the very essence of his character in his repeated voicing of her name. Every "Maggie" brings a chill, so charged with barely repressed rage is it. Miner has power. Every inch of him exudes frustration.

As Maggie, Hurd conveys a different sort of power, a single-minded determination. Her energy seems to come from

an empathetic understanding of the character. This is an exquisite match.

An equally intense performance is given by Vic Zink as Big Daddy. Daddy is a nasty S.O.B. Yet, and this is important, Zink endows him with a strange tenderness, an almost likable quality.

No easy feat. No one wants to feel even a tinge of warmth for a man who says of his wife, "I don't even like her. When she leaves the room, I forget what she looks like. I haven't been able

to stand the sight, sound or smell of that woman for 40 years." Charming.

Big Mama, played by Mattie Wolf, seems oblivious to all this. She feels that long-married couples sometimes suffer from too much devotion. But Wolf gives her character an element of doubt.

She allows us to suspect that Big Mama may know the truth. Her portrayal is finely balanced. Wolf always makes a statement when she's on stage.

IN A SMALL but wonderfully annoying part, Sue Warner also contributes to the vile ambience. She combines feigned saccharinity and viciousness with great ease.

"Cat" suffers from undue prolixity. Nary a thought crosses a character's mind without being verbalized. It is filled with gut-wrenching lines, made less so in this production, perhaps, by the incongruity of having area folks drip with such malice.

Humor abounds. While the extensiveness of this comedic element might have distressed playwright Williams, it adds rather than detracts and indeed provides relief. Nastiness can be draining.

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