

Audience loves 'nostalgic' romance

The Birmingham Village Players production of "Romantic Comedy" by Bernard Slade continues at 8:30 p.m. Friday-Saturday at the playhouse on the corner of Hunter Blvd. and Chestnut Street, south of Maple Road, in Birmingham. Tickets at \$4 are available at the door or by calling 644-2075.

By Cathie Breidenbach
special writer

Bernard Slade's "Romantic Comedy" is a refreshing, perhaps nostalgic, return to ideals about love that dominated the first half of the revolutionary century.

Imagine a modern play that applauds the virtues of good-old-fashioned sexual love and lust and never even hints about the other kind. Imagine a play that takes three acts and 12 years to get the hero and heroine in the sack together and holds to the belief that it's decidedly had form to carry on with one person when married to another.

In real life, and especially in the theater, such antiquated ideas about love supposedly surrendered years ago to more free-wheeling sexual mores.



photo by ELIZABETH CARRIGUE

Gene and Audrey Grier go over a song with Ron DeRoo of the Oakland University music staff during academy classes the Griers teach on campus.

Students develop positive images

Continued from Previous Page

The Griers, who celebrated their 10th anniversary this summer, have no children of their own but they clearly enjoy building the egos of their students. "We love you and we look forward to each and every Saturday we're with you," Gene tells his students in a post-rehearsal lecture.

AWAY FROM the kids, the effervescent and irrepressibly outspoken Grier says, "We love it because these kids are so great. These are kids who are secure within themselves and they've got such wonderful attitudes." And even if they don't always come to him that way, it's evident in a public performance (which the academy has at least twice a year) that that's the way they leave the academy. First-year students often appear to be polished professionals when they solo, and the ensemble choreography is precise and resembles the work of older and more mature show-business performers.

Every student who has left the academy and gone on in music has won a scholarship. Most of the former students are in an aspect of show business or are pursuing a degree in music in a college.

Admitting they are frequently tough on their students, the Griers aim to

teach young people how to perform in front of an audience with a look of complete professionalism.

"We're tough but honest," says Gene. "We won't accept anything but a best effort. Whatever they do on stage better be the best they can do."

"THEY WOULD rather flop" on stage than have to face me afterwards if it wasn't their best effort. Most of them think after they left the stage, 'Wow! I didn't think I could do it!'

"But I knew they could all the time or I wouldn't have made them do it. That's our teaching technique."

Besides weekly rehearsals and classes at Oakland University, the academy students often appear on television and occasionally do tours and out-of-state performances. The students performed in New York City two years ago for the American Choral Directors Association convention.

Because of the Griers' widespread contacts in the music world, the students frequently have special opportunities to study with such renowned choral directors and arrangers as Norman Luboff, John Rutter and Kirby Shaw.

review

Both Jason and Phoebe marry, but not each other, and this fact rightfully interferes with the course of their romance. Debra Ball plays Jason's wife, Allison, with appropriate cool sophistication and Harry Loucks plays Phoebe's husband, Leo, as a rough-edged good guy. Harry, who's a master comedian, times his lines superbly to leave room for laughter, but he seemed less at ease with serious passages.

Maureen Cook plays Jason's assist-

ant as a woman who's been around the wheel of love numerous times and comes out with her wit and kindness intact. To paraphrase her line, "I married once for sex, once for money, and once for good conversation and none of them is what I've cracked up to be." Of course not, because those old-fashioned ingredients love and friendship were missing.

The tasteful set of Jason's study lends credibility and color to the play — combining green, purple and coral — for sophisticated/arty style appropriate to a man who would wear an off-the-rack suit or a polyester tie. Director Dea Dweley keeps the action rolling and the laughter simmering.

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