



DARY GASKY/Staff photographer

Young Joe Hardy (Kim Cooke) is tempted by the charms of Lola (Dee Dee Johns-Charlton) and by Applegate, the Devil in disguise (Ben Benson), in the Birmingham Village Players production of the musical "Damn Yankees," opening Friday, Feb. 8.

upcoming things to do

• 'DAMN YANKEES'

The Birmingham Village Players will present the musical "Damn Yankees" at 8:30 p.m. Fridays-Saturdays, Feb. 8-9, 10-11, and 2 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 10, at the playhouse in Birmingham. Tickets at \$5 are available at the door, but reservations are recommended. For reservations, call 644-2075 anytime. A performance at 8 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 14, will benefit the Birmingham Area Seniors Coordinating Council and Center. Tickets at \$7.50 include the show and an afterglow. For further information, call 642-1040.

• ROMANTIC COMEDY

"Isn't It Romantic," a comedy by Wendy Wasserstein, opens Thursday, Feb. 14, at the Birmingham Theatre. The production stars Ann Flood of ABC-TV's "The Edge of Night." Also in the cast is Michael Minor, who played in ABC-TV's "All My Children." Performances continue through Sunday, March 17. For ticket information, call the box office at 644-3533.

• ST. DUNSTON'S

"Tintypes," the winter production of St. Dunstan's Guild of Cranbrook, will be presented at 8:30 p.m. Fri-

days-Saturdays, Feb. 1-2 and 8-9, at the playhouse in Bloomfield Hills. "Tintypes" takes place at the turn of the century, with musical vignettes that reflect the hope of a young America from 1890 through 1920. The cast includes Lindsay Balmer, Bonnie Cook, Gary Jones, Pat Lynch and Diane Rydberg. For ticket information, call 644-6527 anytime.

• FARMINGTON PLAYERS

"You Can't Take It With You," comedy classic by Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman, will be presented by the Farmington Players from Friday, Feb. 1, to Saturday, Feb. 23, at the Farmington Players Barn in Farmington Hills. Call 624-5061 for ticket information.

• BENEFIT DANCE

Saxophone star Larry Nozera and his group will play dance music at a benefit dinner dance beginning at 7 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 2, at the Farmington Elks in Farmington Hills. Magician Joe Vittorillo will perform between sets. The event is sponsored by the Women's Association of the Franklin M. Loew World Center for Animal Disease Control. For more information, call 540-1292, or after 6 p.m. 591-0362.

As a whole, conveying the farcical

review

are Monica and Sam, played by Elaine Bolke and Frank Cosenza, along with Grace and Howard, played by Pat Varga and Hamid Dana. The as-yet-to-be committed couple is Michelle and Alen, played by Shannon McNutt and Michael Hoyer.

As a whole, conveying the farcical elements with vigor. Two performances stand out. Elaine Bolke makes a spirited Monica — sophisticated and with a grudge against mellowing into middle age. Pat Varga indulges Grace with giddy pangs of remorse for her blushing indiscretion.

THE LOWER LEVEL at Somerset offers a comfortable safe-like setting for enjoying an evening of intimate dining, capped by a lively theatrical performance. There are well-spaced tables, each embellished with that always-welcome nicety, a tablecloth and a single candle. Soft lighting complements the buffet-style dinner.

The salad selection is modest but more than amply compensated for by a generous array of roast chicken, noodles Alfredo and a delightful stir-fry vegetable tastefully garnished with tiny shrimp.

Drinks may be obtained by purchasing tickets at the entrance, although my lone scotch and water somehow got misplaced among the water goblets and there was difficulty distinguishing one from the other.

As background music, the haunting theme from "Somewhere in Time" provides an agreeable touch.

Libel case makes strong drama

Performances of the Meadow Brook Theatre production of "A Case of Libel" by Henry Denker continue through Sunday, Feb. 17, on the Oakland University campus near Rochester. For ticket information, call 377-3300.

Henry Denker's play, "A Case of Libel," is top-notch courtroom drama. The Meadow Brook cast brings out the size and the humor in this play, which is based on a court case between columnist Westbrook Pegler and war correspondent Quentin Reynolds.

Denker takes his facts from the book "My Life in Court" by flamboyant lawyer Louis Nizer.

The prosecuting attorney is a razzle-dazzle showman, a P.T. Barnum of the courtroom who masterfully manipulates the jury. The defendant is a run-of-the-mill rightist with a fondness for stinging moralistic pronouncements, who writes a syndicated column read by millions. The charge of libel is brought the famous war correspondent, who is suing for damages.

Tony Mockus returns to Meadow Brook to play with commanding excitement the silver-haired lawyer, Robert Sloane. Mockus paces the stage with a lion-like presence. The lawyer splices his arguments with bawdy humor as he defends his client against accusations of public nudity and wanton wenching.

MOCKUS BRINGS the aura of experience and credibility to the role of the colorful Robert Sloane. John Eames plays the bald, bitter columnist Boyd Bendix to the melodramatic limit. A showman of another sort, Bendix calls the plaintiff "Commie and coward," uses deliberately incendiary language and piles on the alliteration. He's a nasty man far on the self-righteous side of conservative.

In the hands of master-lawyer Sloane, he comes off as vindictive and imbalanced. The jury/audience loved to hate him and relished his eloquent wickedness.

When the court calls Colonel Douglas to testify at the trial, Scottish r's roll off the witness stand like heater off the hill. Decked out as he is in authentic



Cathie Breidenbach

woolen plaid and tam and limping from old war wound, Arthur Beer's cameo appearance demonstrates how much credibility, humor and honest emotion a good actor can pack into a short time on stage.

The plaintiff, Dennis Cocoran, played by Phillip Locker, is a good enough guy who's been wronged. Despite testimony relating his daring as a war correspondent, Locker's Cocoran is an anguished, rather dull fellow.

HIS WIFE IS not much better. In little white gloves and proper lady hat, Maureen McDivitt is so much the pretty, dutiful wife that she nearly ceases to be a person.

If showmanship and mudslinging bezadze this fictionalized version of a famous trial, real issues are nevertheless at stake. The press has power to ruin reputations and dry up income. Denker's play insists that we must periodically challenge the press to insure it uses its power responsibly in the service of truth.

The supporting cast in David Regal's fine directing premiere at Meadow Brook is carefully chosen. David Fox is a credible Abner Coles, a man once nearly destroyed by negative public opinion. He's fearful of the battle against the press but brave enough to take fire for what he believes.

Fred Alston, one of Cocoran's editors, crumbles under pressure. He's a sniveling coward who hides in a bottle and rationalizes his failures. Peter Gregory Thomson winnows convincingly.

George Gatto as the defense attorney is a droll foil for Sloane's wit, and Mary Benson pulls off her role as Sloane's secretary with her usual chirpy good humor. J.C. Howe as the judge and Detroit actors Paul Hopper and Ron Samuel turn in admirable performances.

Fireworks in the Meadow Brook courtroom rival the best of Marvin Belli or F. Lee Bailey. If only the poker-faced young court assistant on stage would react to the drama under his nose with the ease that the audience/jury did.

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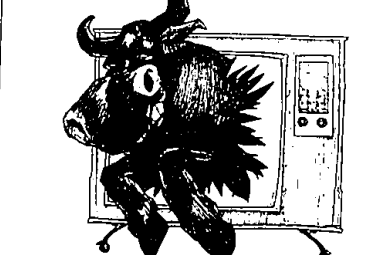
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Cheating couples spark comedy

Performances of "Cheaters" by Michael Jacobs, presented by Jimmy Launice Productions, continue Fridays-Saturdays through April 27 at Somerset Dinner Theatre at Somerset Mall in Troy. Cocktails are at 7 p.m., dinner at 7:30 and curtain at 8:45. Tickets at \$18.95 per person include buffet dinner by Alfred's and show. For reservations, call 643-8885.

By Frank Hursley
special writer

"Cheaters," a poignant Broadway comedy that also touched in Detroit's Fisher Theatre, currently amuses as a Jimmy Launice Production at Somerset Dinner Theatre. Under Timothy Lenta's direction, the production is a jaunty succession of volatile scenes. Lenta draws the utmost from his cast for a rousing, comedic appraisal of sex and romance.

The scenery is sparse, with an overriding focus upon a predominant bed. A different bed-covering signifies a change of setting.

"Cheaters" is a jarring, though predictable, comedy centered on spouse infidelity as contrasted with the current generation's mode of buskkeeping — the current vogue, that is, of setting up an experimental, see-if-it-works foundation, unbound by the traditional marriage certificate.

IN THIS PLAY neither method proves much of a winner. However, along with the lowering of the final curtain comes a brief gleam of hope that the traditional knot binding will prevail.

The players render some fine balanced acting. Married couples who cheat on each other, trading partners,