

Intelligence marks comedy

Performances of the Meadow Brook Theatre production of Alan Ayckburn's "Taking Steps" continue through Sunday, April 14, on the Oakland University campus near Rochester. For ticket information, call the box office at 377-3300.

For hyperbolic hilarity, "Taking Steps" at Meadow Brook Theatre is an uproarious delight. The comedy farce by Alan Ayckburn, the playwright many call the Neil Simon of Great Britain, piles on the laughs without surrendering its intelligence.

Clever set design maximizes the humorous shenanigans of the six-member cast. Set designer Barry Griffith creates on the Meadow Brook stage the illusion of a three-story Victorian mansion with false stairways to rush up and down, doors to alarm and closets in which characters get trapped.

Each person in the play, directed by Carl Schurr, has a distinguishing peculiarity. The young attorney who arrives to complete purchase of a mansion is outrageously inarticulate. He tangles sentences and misspells meaning — hardly the smooth-talking lawyer type.

William Kix who plays the attorney, is a welcome newcomer to the Meadow Brook stage. He projects a shy, klutzy virility that is perfect for that part of the man who succumbs to the charms of a bordello ghosted end up in bed with two live women. Not bad for a fellow who can't say a word without tripping on his tongue.

GEORGE GTO plays the hard-drinking business tycoon who wants a big hole to match his big success. He's as unperturbed by the mansion's lily roof and its decadent history as a brothel as he is by tales that vengeful ghost haunts the place. He's jovial and assured — until he learns that his wife is leaving him.

Jillian Lindig is the wife who'd rather be dancing, postures and poses with evergreen of her long limber legs. Lindig, fine actress that she is, does an admirable job. The problem is in casting. It's hard to imagine that the aristocratic and assured Lindig could ever have been silly chorus-line cutie, which is where her tycoon



Cathie Breidenbach

husband brags he found her. A dippy young dancer with dilutions of art would have been inherently more humorous. Where are you, Goldie Hawn?

Her brother, Mark, enlisted to help her escape from her husband, has problems of his own — a fiancée who skipped out on him on their wedding day and a propensity for putting people to sleep with his less-than-schillatting conversation. Part of the humor of the dear, dull man, played by Henson Keys, is that he never has a clue why anything happens to him.

His fiancée shows up and joins the parade of people running about the mansion. The choreographed chase is designed to make the audience laugh, and it succeeds. So does Jane Houdyshell as the confused fiancée who can't make up her mind about anything except that she doesn't want anybody muscling in on her right to be indecisive.

The mansion's present owner, a middle-aged Yamaha jockey played by Donald Ewer, arrives dressed like Darth Vader to negotiate the sale of his house. He and the tycoon take an inspection tour of the premises and join the parade of people scurrying up and downstairs.

The jumbled speeches, garbled farewell notes and general lack of communication of these six oddballs makes for uproariously funny entertainment.



Jillian Lindig is Elizabeth Boxer Crabbs, the wife who once was a chorine, in the Michigan premiere of "Taking Steps," at Meadow Brook Theatre.

St. Dunstan's offers polished production, 'Nuts'

Performances of the St. Dunstan's Guild of Cranbrook production of "Nuts" by Tom Topor continue at 8:30 p.m. Friday-Saturday at the playhouse at Cranbrook in Bloomfield Hills. For ticket information, call 644-0327 nytime.

By Barbara Michaels
special writer

Anyone who doubts that good community theater can have the emotional impact of top-notch professional theater should head straight for "Nuts," the

current production by St. Dunstan's Guild of Cranbrook.

This fascinating courtroom drama is presented with consummate skill and polish. Acting, directing and technical achievements all mesh, and director Betsy Todd does an especially fine job of integrating newcomers with the group's many talented stage veterans.

"Nuts" takes place in the courtroom attached to the psychiatric wing of New York's Bellevue Hospital. A sanity hearing is being conducted on Claudia Draper (Bonnie Cook) because the young woman's suburban, middle-class

review

parents would rather have her locked up in a mental ward than stand trial as a prostitute accused of killing one of her clients.

Claudia fights to uphold her sanity and right to stand trial, screaming to her parents and the court, "I won't be nuts for you!" She and her young lawyer (Martin Flynn) employ some unusual tactics and elicit some wrenching

testimony.

AS CLAUDIA, Cook gives a riveting performance, projecting barely suppressed rage and frustration with every nuance of movement and facial expression. Claudia's erratic courtroom behavior would seem to confirm the diagnosis of paranoia until she takes the stand and neatly discredits the system trying to railroad her.

Flynn appears cool and competent as defense counsel Aaron Levinsky, undaunted by his client's antics and the weight of the evidence against her. Weston Meyer is wonderful as Arthur Kirk, Claudia's devoted stepfather

who raised her after her own father abandoned his family. Kirk visibly disintegrates on the witness stand as the past is brought to light. Having taught Claudia that everything has a price on it, he is pathetically touching as he whips out his checkbook to try and buy back unpleasant truths.

Lee Rosendorf is effective as Rose, Claudia's anguished mother. The heartaches of her own past lead her into a deep reverie on the witness stand. Her tears seem very real as it becomes painfully apparent there will be no "winner" in this case.

Norris Andersen is highly convincing as Dr. Herbert Rosenthal, the examining psychiatrist in the case. Despite extensive experiences with sanity hearings, Rosenthal crumbles when his motives and values come under attack on the witness stand. Andersen has an expressive face that speaks volumes throughout the play.

Gary Walker is appropriately busineslike as prosecutor Franklin Macmillan. As the routine case starts to careen out of control though, Walker lets his expressive face convey his frustrations.

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