

Comedy about nuclear threat has really hilarious moments

Performances of the Actors Alliance Theatre Company production of "End of the World" continue through Sunday, May 25, in Southfield.

By Cathie Breidenbach
special writer

"End of the World" by Arthur Kopit, proves once again that style counts at least as much as content in a good play. How else could a comedy about the threat of nuclear annihilation be funny?

"End of the World" is funny, sometimes hilarious, and it's also thought provoking. The "Catcher" realties in this Michigan premiere take a back seat to comedy and to the mystery of trying to predict what could possibly happen in this totally unpredictable tale about a writer/pseudodetective who's commissioned to write a play about the end of the world.

Several scenes in the play go miles beyond funny to comic mastery. Please, let us see more of the comic duo of Ted Raimi and Jonathan Katz next season. Their timing is inspired, whether they're playing harried waiters, twin goons a la the Blues Brothers, military aides, or a bachelor pair of in-the-know Washingtonians whipping up a Caesar salad as they talk politics.

It's like watching two guys rub their own tummies and pat each other's heads at the same time. Through it all they talk double time about political double speak. Fantastic.

TWO OTHERS scenes, both in restaurants, are little comedy gems under the inspired direction of Annette Madias. An unnerving sense of deja vu takes over in a Japanese restaurant when Bob Jordan as Merv Rosenblatt, a Henry Kissinger-like character, does a manic routine about "anticipatory retaliation" —

bombing the enemy before they bomb you because you know what he's planning and must beat him to the draw if you want to stay on top — so you retaliate to punish him for what he plans to do before he does it.

According to Arthur Kopit, such is the thread of illogic by which the world hangs. He must have used a crystal ball when he wrote of international politics long before Moamr and Itom decided to have it out? Ted Moniak as an egomaniac agent dominates the scene at the Russian Tea Room. Not even Divina Cook's expert playing of the straight woman can reclaim the scene once the agent's ego gets rolling.

The Actors Alliance Theatre Company brings this intriguing play to life on the strength of its superb supporting cast including Ted Moniak, Bob Jordan, Susan Reno, Divina Cook, plus the irrepressible comic pair of Raimi and Katz. Christopher Darga as the playwright, Michael Trent plays it straight and seems overwhelmed whether in character or out. David Fox as the moneybags funding Mr. Trent also plays it straight — too straight.

The expert supporting cast and attention to detail are what make "End of the World" work. Even the monolithic backdrop behind the stage space arrests the imagination as good art should.

Comedy 'Matchmaker' just doesn't match up

Performances of the Farmington Players production of "Matchmaker" by Thornton Wilder continue through Saturday, May 17. For ticket information, call 626-5061.

By Barbara Michals
special writer

In the age-old battle of the sexes, men only think they're smarter than women, says the Thornton Wilder comedy "The Matchmaker" (better known in its musical adaptation as "Hello, Dolly!"). The current production by the Farmington Players achieves only mixed success.

While many of the principals do fine work, overall polish is noticeably lacking. Numerous inexperienced actors in supporting roles have deliveries as flat as the show's spartan, one-dimensional sets.

The title character is Dolly Levy (Cec Orman), an eminently practical widow who sets her cap for wealthy businessman Horace Vandergelder (Dick Coe) and succeeds in making him think the match is entirely his idea. Along the way, she also patches up a few other affairs of the heart.

Orman only occasionally shows flashes of Dolly's irrepressible

spunk. The rest of the time she is pleasant but pedestrian in the role.

COE IS QUITE convincing as the crusty, tight-fisted, chauvinistic Vandergelder who mistreats his clerks, bullies his niece and generally growsl at everyone. Coe keeps his blister understated, and the effect works nicely, increasing credibility that Dolly would consider marrying the old curmudgeon.

Addressing the audience with the self-assurance of the very rich, Coe explains, "Ninety-nine percent of the world are fools, and the rest of us are in great danger of contagion." He also causes quite a stir when he arrogantly confides that marriage is nothing more than making a housekeeper think she's a householder.

Mike Brick is engaging as Vandergelder's earnest young clerk, Cornelius Hackl, and Robert Ellmann gives real zest to Hackle's assistant, Barnaby Tucker. The two newlyweds set out for a day of adventure and get far more than they bargained for.

Barbara Michals teaches high school English and journalism in Southfield. A theater critic for the last 12 years, she is an inveterate player who regularly catches up on all the New York productions.



Cathie Breidenbach

There's not enough variety in 'Sing for Your Supper'

Performances of the Meadow Brook Theatre production of the musical revue "Sing for Your Supper" continue through Sunday, May 18, on the Oakland University campus in Rochester Hills. For ticket information, call 377-3300.

The whole is less than the sum of the parts in Meadow Brook Theatre's production of "Sing for Your Supper."

In spite of a quality cast and a roster of winning songs by Rogers and Hart, the production suffers from too much of a good thing.

More than 80 of the finest songs by the famous team are presented in a slick, Broadway-style revue. That's already a bit monotonous to anyone except die-hard fans of Rogers and Hart.

The problem is compounded by lack of any real plot and little variation in musical dynamics. Nothing

much sets one song apart from another, and somewhere in the second act, all the songs start to sound alike.

THE SIX-PERSON cast of Pl Douglas, Karen Eubanks, Joy Franz, Bev Larson, Jess Richards and Steve Steiner honed their skills on Broadway. It shows. All are polished professionals with good voices, dancing ability and a genuine flair for comedy.

Some of the comedy seems peculiarly out of sync with the tone of the song it's supposed to illuminate. Perhaps director Judith Haskell feels that modern audiences can't stomach quite that much sweetness in one evening, so she chose to ham up a few of the pretty love songs to keep the audience from drowning in sentiment.

Douglas and Eubanks bring a hint more vitality to their dance

roulins and more soul to their songs, which is not to imply that the show drags. It doesn't at all.

Director Haskell keeps the cast stepping briskly as the show flows smoothly through the years that Rodgers and Hart worked together turning out hit musicals. They started when still in their teens and the partnership lasted a lifetime.

RODGERS WROTE the music and Hart supplied lyrics that tempered sympathy with a wry dash of wit.

And, of course, love is a frequent theme. The pair turned out all-time great love songs "Blue Moon" and "Bewitched" and a score of other hits about being in love, falling out of love and various ironies and agonies in between.

Cathie Breidenbach, a West Bloomfield resident, is a freelance writer and theater buff.

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