Entertainment

Comedy star faces up to fun



Jo Anne Worley, who rose to fame as a brazen personality on TV's "Laugh-in," stars as Olive in the female version of "The Odd Couple" at the Birmingham Theatre.

tati writer

Letting Jo Anne Worley to mug for the camera is easy. You don't even have to ask. The photographer, who wanted to shoot a variety of facial expressions, began snapping closs-ups of Worley over the lunchion table at the Midtown Cafe in Birmingham.

Itumediately, she went into an act, making funny faces and clowing around – even pulling the turtleneck of her black longsleeved top up over her head. Then she turned back to the interview at hand, remaining energetic but no longer

up over her head. Then she turned back to the Interview at I hand, remaining energetic but no longer "on stage."

In person, Worley looks like the character she brought to fame on "Laugh-In," her huge, dark eyes accentuated by thick fake eyelashes and lots of eyeliner. She has a wide grin and tousled block halt.

She's tall — five-foot-eight and a-balf, she said — but slimmer than expected. Worley doesn't come across as big and brassy, which is the way she appeared on "Laugh-In".

She claims, however, that on "Laugh-In".

She claims, however, that on "Laugh-In" she played herself. And Worley said she has to watch out when doing other roles, so she doesn't play her "Laugh-In" part instead of the character in the script.

"I JUST DID me, bigger, quick-er," she said of "Laugh-in." They gave me the jokes that weren't too good. I would laugh after, and punctuate it."

Over the Midtown lunch, Worley



described the character she portrays in Neil Simon's all-female version of "The Odd Couple." The play, in which she co-stars with Sandy Dennis, is in its first week at the Birmingham Theatre.

Last week, after lunch she would head for rebearsal at the theater just a few doors away from the restaurant. Shirl Harris, public relations director for the theater, said that tickets were going like gang-busters." A potent combination. Worley is the Olive Madison half of "The Odd Couple." Olive, instead of Oscar, "produces a news program, as opposed to being a Sportswriter," she said Dennis is Floreram, as opposed to being a Sportswriter, she said Dennis is Floreram, as opposed to being a Sportswriter, she said Dennis is Floreram, as opposed to being a Sportswriter, she said Dennis is Floreram as opposed to being a Sportswriter, she said Dennis is Floreram and the Sportswriter, she said the said Sportswriter, she said Couple. The Sportswriter is she should be said to she said the said Sportswriter, she said the said Sportswriter, she said the said Sportswriter, she said couple. The said Sportswriter is she should be said the said Sportswriter in the said Sportswriter.

DURING THE interview, Worley was as pleased to talk about her husband as about herself. She said



they first met when she came to Los Angeles as young actress. He was playing Ensign Pulver in "Mr. Roberts."

She said when he was on stage. There was a light around him, and there was no spotlight on him." She saw him in rehearsal and said to a friend, "Let's go see that guy with alight around him."

Was that light his "aura?" She said that must have been it, although she didn't know the word then, and she was the only one who saw the light.

"I knew I loved him," is her recollection of the feelings she first had for him. She only knew him casually, however, and they didn't really get together until years later.

In the meantime, they had a mutual friend, a songwriter whom Perry came to visit in New York, when she was working there at nightclubs in Greenwich Village.

Worley SAID she once told

WORLEY SAID she once told Perry, who then was married to another woman, "When you dump her give me a cail." By the time she joined the cast of 'Laugh-in," Perry had been divorced for sever-al years. She was in Las Vegas appearing

at the Sands with Dick Rowan and Dan Martin when he called. "Our first date was with Gypsy Rose Lee at a fundraiser in Los Angeles," she said to fundraiser in Los Angeles," she work was to be the comment of the comme

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Worley, Dennis paired hilariously in 'Odd Couple'

Performances of the female version of "The Odd Couple" by Neil Simon continue through Sun-day, Nov. 30, at the Birmingham Theatre. For ticket information call the box office at 644-3533.

By Barbara Michala special writer

"The Odd Couple" has been synonymous for a mismatched twosome since the characters of Felix Unger and Oscar Madison debuted 21 years ago in the popular Neil Simon comedy. As currently performed at the Birmingham Theatre, Simon's new female version of the play is still hilarious.

Michais

The excellent cast stars Sandy Dennis and Jo Anne Worley, two fine actresses who work hard to ensure that their characters not only survive the gender transformation but are memorable in their own right as well.

Felix has become Florence (Dennis), a lovable neurotic obsessed with cleaning and hypochondria. Oscar is now Olive (Worley), the good-

Barbara

natured slob who offers to share her apartment after Florence's mar-riage breaks up. Much of the original witty repar-tee remains intact, while some of the gags have been slightly aftered and others completely rewritten.

THE MALE VERSIONS of the characters remain inherently funnier. A woman in an apron com-

stite significance as the men's poker game.

Nevertheless, the chemistry between Dennis and Worley works well and carns them plenty of laughs. Dennis, who has always excelled at playing neurole women, does an imperceable job with facial expressions, voice inflections and comite timing. Worley, the effer vescent comedicanne of television's "Laugh-In," still pubbles as she prods and cajoles the whinny Florence to make the most of her new single state. Worley adds a lot of warmth to the role. Olive is

plaining she's slaved all day over a hot stove seems all too commonplace compared to a man doing so. The women's weekly Trivial Pursuit game does not hold the same ritualistic significance as the men's poker game. Nevertheless, the chemistry between Dennis and Worley works well and earns them plenty of laughs. Dennis, who has always excelled at playing neuroit women, does an impeccable job with facial expressions, works, the effervescent comedia. The sum of the comparison of

UNDER DIRECTOR Philip Cu-sack, the laughs flow with perfect pacing, and entire production is pleasingly slick.

While Worley's bodly colored ca-sual clothes are well-sulted to Olive's personality, Dennis' loose, flowing multiple layers are far too laid-back for the fastidlous Florence.

laid-back for the fastidious Fiorence.
The inevitible clash of two
mismatched individuals trying to
live together seems even more universal than the battle of the sexes.
One can imagine infinite variations
on "The Odd Couple" in years to

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

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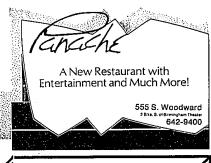
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