

'Harvey' still a charmer

Performances of the Meadow Brook Theatre production of "Harvey" by Mary Chase continue through Sunday, May 15, at Oakland University in Rochester Hills. For ticket information, call the box office at 377-3300.

By Cathie Breidenbach
special writer

In an era of barbed Joan Rivers' humor and biting satire, Meadow Brook's winning revival of Mary Chase's open-hearted 1944 classic, "Harvey," comes as sheer comic delight.

In "Harvey," ingenious eccentric Elwood P. Dowd strikes up warm friendships with everyone he meets, even with such unlikely sorts as phone solicitors and psychiatric nurses trying to lock him up. Dowd likes nothing better than "hoisting a few" with his good buddy, Harvey, an invisible, 6-foot, 3-inch rabbit.

review

There's the rub. Common sense, not to mention the accumulated wisdom of psychiatric science, says Elwood hallucinates Harvey; therefore Elwood must be "nuts." Irish legend puts one over on the shrinks. In this play, because Harvey is a pooka, the name given a fairy in the shape of an animal who's visible only to people favored by the spirits.

Will Love plays a huggable Elwood P. Dowd, a man with impeccable manners, shiny-bright eyes and infectious bonhomie. Elwood leaves a trail of chaos in his wake because the world doesn't know quite how to deal with his trusting nature or his attachment to the invisible Harvey.

Elwood's sister, Veta Louise, tries to put him away in the looney bin outside of town because he

hangs out with Harvey. She frets that Harvey will be the undoing of her aspirations to become a society hostess, and that he'll thwart her ambitions to marry her daughter, Myrtle Mae, to a suitable young man.

JAYNE HOUDYSHELL plays Veta Louise with a bustling way of walking and with fine command of comic detail. Cheryl Williams, as her daughter Myrtle Mae, imitates her mother's putt-putt walk and her maternally managerial ways. Excellent costumes by Mary Lynn Bonnell complement the cast's fine characterizations.

Director Terrence Kilburn skillfully brings out the idiosyncrasies of the playwright's characters and raises the gentle question whether Elwood's generous, kindly way of being "nuts" may not be so crazy after all. Meadow Brook's solid supporting cast includes Jeanne Arnold, Thomas M. Suda, Judy Dery, Roy Dennison and Phillip Locker.



ART EMANUELE/staff photographer

Playwright Jim Burnstein told teachers at Burger Center in Garden City about "Learn to Fall," his new play about autism. Burnstein, who now lives in Plymouth, attended Groves High School in Birmingham. Howie Buten, a psychologist and an entertainer known as Butto the Clown, works with autistic children. He asked his friend Burnstein, who grew up with him, to write the play. (See story on Entertainment page 7C).

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