



**Barbara Michals**

## Warm Oscar pairs with a funny Felix

Oscar and Felix, whose widely divergent personalities have made them legendary pop culture figures, continue to be absolutely hilarious in the Birmingham Village Players' current production of Neil Simon's "The Odd Couple."

Oscar Madison (Tom D'Agostino) is the cigar-chomping, lovable alo who lets the ashes fall where they may and the debris pile up in his apartment. Divorced and lonely, in a moment of weakness Oscar lets his poker pal Felix move in with him after Felix's wife has just thrown him out.

Felix Unger (Kim Fox) is Oscar's natural antithesis, a fuss-budget obsessed with tidiness and so up-light that "even his hair is clenched." Felix's incessant cleaning, nagging, and hypochondria turn laid-back Oscar into a supreme grouch and drive him to open rebellion.

D'Agostino is an unusually personable Oscar, and the effect is to make the character even more credible and increase the empathy when he finally blows up at Felix. D'Agostino has a precise, well-defined delivery that never falters.

Fox is an excellent, exceptionally funny Felix. He starts out a bit understated, allowing Felix's compulsive behavior to build in intensity. His wonderfully expressive face speaks volumes, especially his deeply furrowed brow. The sight of Fox in a kitchen apron, brandishing a soup ladle at D'Agostino while he belabors him for arriving home late, is

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as good a piece of classic comedy as it could possibly be.

No one has ever succeeded in making the cutesy Pigeon sisters, Gwendolyn and Cecily, seem any more than a pair of dodos. Karl Sterns and Laurie Shea do their best in the thankless roles of Oscar's cooing, bubble-headed British neighbors. Jerry Weiner, Paul Becker, John Miller Jr. and Phil Whelan as the other long-time poker pals are all thoroughly satisfactory, with Weiner especially natural in his delivery.

Director Bernie Greenberg keeps the pacing smooth and the laughs in all the right places. "The Odd Couple" is perhaps Simon's most beloved and enduring comedy. Successful as a play, film, television series, and in an all-female version, "The Odd Couple" holds up extremely well to repeated viewings. People seem to see something of themselves or those they know in the richly comic creations of Oscar and Felix.

## theater



### 'Amadeus' costars

Simon Brook is young Mozart and Eric Tavaras is Salieri in Peter Shaffer's "Amadeus," opening the 23rd season at Meadow Brook Theatre on the Oakland University campus in Rochester Hills. The play will run for four weeks, beginning at 8 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 6. For ticket information, call the box office at 377-3300.



**Bob Weibel**

## Young cast good in 'Charlie Brown'

Luncheon theater performances of "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown" continue Saturdays-Sundays through Nov. 13, then Sundays only through Dec. 18 at the Karas House in Redford. Lunch is 12 noon, showtime 1 p.m. For ticket information call 559-6-FBP.

The Peanut Butter Players have created a niche for themselves in the Detroit area — the group presents professional children's luncheon theater. Performers range from grade schoolers to early teenagers. First, they serve as waiters and waitresses, then change into makeup and costume to present the show. And they're very good at both.

FBP's current production is the whimsical musical, "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown." It's based on cartoon characters from Charles Schulz's comic strip, "Peanuts." In a series of zippy sketches we meet Snoopy, Lucy, Linus and the gang. And, of course, the something less than perfect, but always lovable Charlie Brown.

Through the experiences of Charlie and friends, we learn that growing up may be hard to do, but it sure is interesting — and fun. Which the audience certainly agrees to, though a few of the jokes go over the head of the very young. No matter, parents and youngsters alike can readily identify with the true-to-life characters, which is one of the charming features of Charlie Brown.

The Saturday cast (a second cast performs Sundays) was, on the whole, an experienced, polished ensemble. After a slightly choppy opening, the cast settled into a harmonious groove. Especially well done were scenes about Valentine's Day Cards, the Baseball Game, and a Peter Rabbit Book Report.

**AMONG NOTEWORTHY** performers is Danny Gurwin as Charlie Brown. His stage persona as an insecure, self-conscious Charlie belies his obvious talents as an accomplished young actor with an already mature singing voice.

Dina Baldwin (Lucy) delivers lines with the timing and emphasis of an experienced comedian. And Katie O'Shaughnessy (Snoopy) has one of those Ethel Merman voices that carries over the orchestra to the back row of the theater.

The orchestra in this case (and bizarre sound effects) consists of an electric piano, expertly handled by music director C.J. Nodus.

The setting features metal tubing fabricated into rectangular platforms. Artwork on window shades provides a backdrop for each scene. Very functional. Very effective.

Bob Weibel of Westland is a freelance writer, who has spent more than 25 years in community theater as a director, designer and performer.

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