

# 'Serenading Louie' looks at compulsions

Performances of "Serenading Louie" continue through Saturday, April 28, at the Smith Theatre on the Orchard Ridge Campus of Oakland Community College in Farmington Hills. For ticket information call 471-7700.

By Richard Marah  
special writer

Everyone is compulsive in one way or another. It just depends on the degree, as to how dangerous it is. This is the basis for "Serenading Louie" at the Smith Theater. The play is more of a character study than story. It focuses on two couples who have been longtime friends and each of them has a compulsion of one kind or another.

Alex, whose only true interest is in himself and his ambitions for the future, is played intensely by Jim Cook. While Alex is a tense character, Cook, who doubles as the show's director, makes him seem like he

Satiric playlets engaging

Performances of "The Apple Tree" presented by the Southfield Performing Arts Center Inc. and Tap Ltd. Productions, continue through Sunday, May 6, at the Days Hotel in Southfield. Dinner or brunch is available. For ticket information call 557-4880.

By Bob Welbel  
special writer

Theatre Arts Productions' latest dinner theater show is the sometimes whimsical, often outrageous little musical "The Apple Tree." As originally produced, the show is three musical playlets — each one satirizing the many facets of a woman's personality.

"TAP" has dropped, however, "The Lady or the Tiger," whose setting with Monte Hall "let's make a deal" doors would be a bit much for a dinner theater room. No matter. It makes for a tighter show. Which, by the way, is a thoroughly enjoyable romp.

Bill Wilson and Jane Shaffmaster play the principal roles. Wilson is blessed with a pleasant voice. His characters are upbeat and cheerful. "Apple Tree" is about women, however. It provides an opportunity for a tour de force performance. And Shaffmaster comes through with a variety of acting and singing talents.

In the first one-act musical, "The Diary of Adam and Eve" (from material by Mark Twain), Shaffmaster creates a rather beguiling Eve, full of youthful innocence, yet with an amusing manipulative power over Wilson's smiling but perplexed Adam.

THEY QUIBBLE about the name of things, fall in love and discover the world. And temptation. And life's darker moments. Cain kills Abel. At last, when Eve dies, the comedy gives way to a rather touching final tribute to Adam. One might wish for a less partisan setting. Clever songs and witty dialogue, however, make for a funny yet poignant one-act.

The second playlet musical, "Passionella," is based on a fantasy by Jules Feiffer. Shaffmaster reminds one of Carol Burnett as she is first a frumpy chimney sweep and then, when she realizes her dream, a buxomy Hollywood Star, complete with pink boa and garish gold gown. She loves being beautiful and famous. And sings up a storm with a sensational rendition of "Gorgeous."

Bill Bilson, Larry Johnson and Earl Vinson effectively perform a variety of roles from narrator to song and dance man. The whole cast has a great time making fun of movie sex symbols.

As usual, the dinner at the Days Inn is served sit-down style in the dining room. And well done.

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could go over the edge at any moment.

Alex's wife, Gabby, only wants a home and family, something Alex really does not have any interest in. Carrie Bieker as Gabby is probably the most convincing of the foursome in the show.

Bieker's emotions really make the audience feel for her character and her character's dilemmas. Gabby is probably the most normal person in the script.

THE MAIN PROBLEM of Carl, Alex's next-door-neighbor, is that he

## review

is fond of liquor and drinks to excess as often as is convenient.

Keith Chmiel, who plays Carl, seems uncertain as to how he wants to play the role. There are times when Carl has a distinct accent, while at other times, he speaks with no accent. Chmiel's display of emotion is similarly variable.

Carl's wife, Mary, is mainly interested in having a nice home, a nice daughter, a nice career and a good time. Carl just happens to be the only way she can maintain her lifestyle. As far as the good time goes, she has no shame in getting it any way she can, including having an affair with her husband's accountant.

Lori Lipten is somewhat bland as Mary. While the character of Mary is not exactly exciting, Lipten does little to add much feeling to the role. Despite the few shortcomings of the cast, the performers are still successful in transmitting the personas of their characters and in delivering the play's message to the audience.

The stage features a simple space set. The couple's homes are on opposite sides of the stage, with effectively defined lighting separating the two homes. There is a problem when the set is brought together for an extended version of Carl's home. At

first, there is no way to determine whose home the four are in.

IN THE SECOND act, there is some surrealism added to the show when Carl and Alex converse in person while still supposedly in their respective homes.

This effect would work much better if the neighbor joining in the conversation is in a spotlight, defining the surrealistic effect. As it is, because of the matching pieces of furniture in the two homes, the audience can be confused as to what is really going on.

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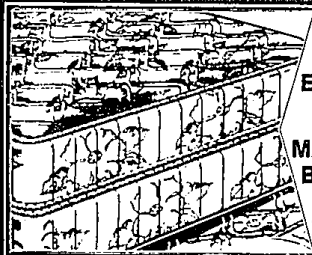
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