

Well done but not 'comedy'

Performances of the Birmingham Village Players production of "Enter a Free Man" continue through Saturday, Feb. 2, at the playhouse in Birmingham. For ticket information, call the box office at 644-2075 anytime.

Billed as a comedy, Tom Stoppard's "Enter a Free Man" seems more like a bittersweet drama with overtones of tragedy. Though beautifully performed by the Birmingham Village Players' very able cast, the production generates very little laughter.

Director Michael Gravame has elicited many fine characterizations from his cast and cannot be faulted for the limitations of the material. Stoppard's plays are always very "talky," but "Enter a Free Man" is noticeably lacking the sophisticated wit and erudite word-play that are usually the author's hallmarks.

George Riley (Larry Sweet), a middle-aged Englishman, fancies himself an inventor and has spent years tinkering with a succession

of impractical devices. At home he gets little respect from his wife (Joan Heddy) and daughter (Laura Sheen), the latter resorting to having to work as a shop clerk to support the family.

As Riley, Sweet adeptly handles an enormous load of dialogue and is eminently believable. His total lack of a British accent would be perfectly acceptable if everyone else in the production wasn't doing such an excellent job with their accents.

PLAYING PERSEPHONE. Riley's wife, Heddy, is wryly amusing as she constantly pursues her compulsive housecleaning, oblivious to her husband's chatter and her daughter's mounting anger. This family has a lot of cobwebs to get rid of, but the vacuum and duster are not the right tools.

Alternating between sullen and rebellious, Linda is very convincing as daughter Sine and builds great sympathy for a character who starts out not very likeable. At the neighborhood pub Riley is affectionately tolerated as a color-



Barbara Michals

ful character. Mistaking some friendly banter for a serious business offer and new romance, Riley deludes himself into thinking that he has finally earned the respect and admiration he deserves.

At the pub, Stephen Tadevic and John Heddy are absolutely perfect in their supporting roles. Tadevic plays Able, a congenial but somewhat dim-witted sailor home on leave, and Heddy is Mr. Brown, a very proper businessman in a three-piece suit who is totally flustered by Riley's verbal onslaught.

After Riley's pathetic attempt to run away from home fails, he and his family must confront some unpleasant truths about themselves and their future.

DEANE MARTELL III is good as Harry, the unpendable gambler whom Riley mistakes for a serious business partner. Wendy Shapiro is delightfully tart as Florence, Harry's girlfriend. The always reliable Gary Lee Temple makes the most of the small part of Carmen, the dispassionate bar-keeper who tolerates everything because he has probably seen it all before.

Barbara Michals teaches high school English in Southfield. A theater critic for the last 16 years, she is an inveterate playwright who regularly catches up on all the New York productions.

'I Do! I Do!' on light side

By Mark S. Carley
special writer

review

Edgar A. Guest III, Joe Lannen and Nancy Gurwin just completed their umpteenth revival of the Tom Jones/Harvey Schmidt musical "I Do! I Do!" at the Jewish Community Center in West Bloomfield.

The play, produced by Birmingham-based Janus Productions, chronicles the 50-year marriage of Michael and Agnes, a late 19th/early 20th century couple.

The production is lively, light and funny. Songs are well sung and jokes well delivered.

HOWEVER, THE warmth, drama and complexity of the script and characters are ignored, resulting in a sort of junk food theater experience — tasty but empty.

"I Do! I Do!" is one of those small, intimate musicals that tells a story, establishes characters and uses songs to punctuate moods of joy, sadness, humor and bitterness.

Here, however, it comes off as a song and dance revue with snippets of dialogue thrown in.

THE PROBLEM, I suspect, is that this production was intended to provide Nancy Gurwin with a star vehicle rather than render a serious interpretation of the play.

The playbill describes Gurwin as "Detroit's first lady of the musical stage."

Gurwin is undarguably a talented performer. She can belt out a song with the best of them, and her comic timing is keen.

At her best she is a combination of Ethel Merman and Carol Burnett, with a little Lucille Ball thrown in. Here, however, these qualities simply overwhelm the material, leaving the audience wondering what the point was.

THE MUSIC of "I Do! I Do!" while pleasant is not powerful enough to stand on its own. Most of the songs are catchy, but few are memorable.

Edgar Guest's direction moves the show along at a brisk pace. The best moments are the comic ones, especially those dealing with the trials of parenthood.

WHILE "I Do! I Do!" is a pleasant, warm little musical, it is not the right medium for a belting vaudeville comedian such as Gurwin.

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table talk

Sly Fox chef

Martin Singer has been named executive chef of Machus Sly Fox in Birmingham. He has served as executive chef in various restaurants including the Bay Valley Hotel and Resort in Bay City and also has been affiliated with Gulligan's in Detroit and the Midtown Cafe in Birmingham.

"For Machus Sly Fox, Singer has

created a menu combining longtime favorites with "Tapas" fare for the casual part of the restaurant called Sally's Saloon. Long popular in Spain, Tapas are small courses of various tastes.

The Sally's menu also has such offerings as Asparagus Wrapped in Fresh Salmon, Seafod Nachos, Veal Oscar, Sandwich, Cracker Bread and Crab Cake Sandwich and Sally's Trio of three mini-burgers with different toppings.

Monday-Wednesday, Feb. 14-16, at Tango's Bistro and Bouquets Restaurant at the Radisson Plaza Hotel at Town Center in Southfield. Dinner at Tango's includes Tango's salad, entree from the grill (filet mignon in green peppercorn butter or grilled Gulf shrimp in a red, hot pepper sauce), parsley-buttered new potatoes and fresh vegetables, for \$39.95. Muscie will be by the Loving Cup. At Bouquets, dinner is seafood ravioli in red pepper sauce, Bouquets salad with raspberry herb vinaigrette, Cabernet Sauvignon Sorbet, an entree from the grill (filet in

honey pork sauce or chicken breast in orange-apricot sauce or Pacific salmon in lobster-tarragon sauce), barley pilaf, fresh vegetables, rolls and butter. A battle of chilled champagne is included, along with Chocolate Seduction for dessert and coffee, for \$59.95. For reservations call 827-4000.

Russian Feast

The Lark in West Bloomfield will offer its eighth annual Russian feast, a dinner featuring the cuisine of the Imperial Russian Empire, at 7 p.m. Monday-Tuesday, Feb. 25-26.

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