



Cathie Breidenbach

'Barefoot' is a romp

Performances of the Meadow Brook Theatre production of "Barefoot in the Park" continue through Sunday, March 24, on the Oakland University campus in Rochester Hills. For ticket information call the box office at 377-3300.

Neil Simon's "Barefoot in the Park" pits a sensible, young lawyer, Paul, against his free-spirited, artistic wife, Corie — a classic polarity. Director Terence Kilburn's expert casting and directing capitalize on the generosity of Simon's kind of comedy.

In good-hearted comedies, like this one when it's cast right, idiosyncrasies and foibles are made fun of so we can better cherish what makes characters vulnerable and therefore lovable. Shirleyann Kalafian as Corie, Alexander Web as Paul, Eric Tavares as Victor and especially Jayne Houdyshell as Corie's mother, Mrs. Banks, are generous-spirited and never mean — sometimes self-fish, naive, or fussy perhaps — but never mean.

Mrs. Bank's emerges as a good sport and Simon's true heroine. Houdyshell plays Mrs. Banks, the interfering, mother/mother-in-law

role, with infectious warmth. Even bit players like Joseph Reed as the phone repair man and Paul Hopper as a delivery man aren't resentful after they wheeze and pant up the five, punishing flights of stairs to Paul and Corie's apartment. Nobody has a chip on his shoulder in the New York comedy. What a pleasure!

After six days of mushy, newlywed bliss, Paul and Corie have just moved into a fifth-floor walkup in Greenwich Village when the squabbles begin. Their marriage weathers (literally) a hole in the skylight, a bathroom sans bathtub, and a walk-in closet (the sole way to get to the closet is to walk across the bed) only to founder on irreconcilable differences after an evening entertaining Mrs. Banks and Victor Velasco, the penniless, bon vivant who lives upstairs.

CORIE DECREES Paul an incurable "stuffed shirt" with whom she can't abide living. He's not the pompous, nitpicker-type stuffed shirt, just a careful, practical fellow who prefers to watch the human comedy rather than indulge in its follies. Little things irritate Corie about Paul — he wears gloves to keep his hands warm when the mercury dips — and

she sees that habit as evidence of a fatal lack of spontaneity, zest and adventure.

Director Kilburn doesn't suffer such fears of spontaneity. In a spirit Corie would applaud, Kilburn updates the 1963 script by injecting a throwaway line about Donald Trump and another about video recorders — small playful touches. Peter Hicks' raw set before the furniture arrives in the apartment shows off the cobbyhole corners and squeezed charm that led Corie to fall for the apartment in spite of its flaws — much like we fall for Simon's characters despite their foibles.

Once the furniture arrives — modern decorator-coordinated, expensive-looking stuff (except for the orange crate bar) — the apartment's eccentric charm fades. Would the supposedly artistic, free-spirited Corie really opt for conventional style? A small gripe about an otherwise warmly funny and fine production.

Cathie Breidenbach of West Bloomfield teaches college writing classes and works as a freelance writer.



STEPHEN CANTRELL/Staff photographer

Just imagine

Tom Spriggs (left) and John Lake rehearse a scene from the St. Dunstan's Guild of Cranbrook production of "An Act of Imagination." In the opening scene, Spriggs as Arthur Pulnam fires a pistol at the audience.

The play opens Friday, March 15, and runs through Saturday, March 23. Tickets are \$8 for adults, \$6 for students. For ticket information call 644-0527.

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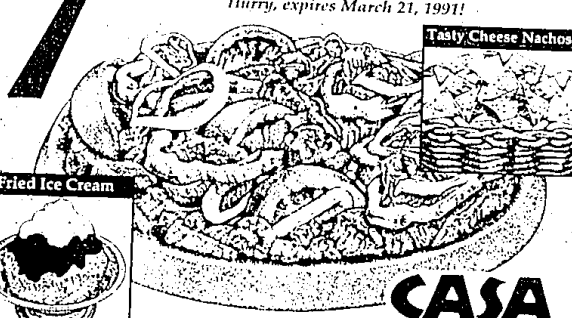
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