

'Arsenic and Old Lace' amusing

Performances of the the Ridge-
dale Players production of "Ar-
senic and Old Lace continue
through Nov. 17 at the playhouse,
205 W. Long Lake Road in Troy.
For ticket information call 444-
8222.

Deciding to do an old chestnut like
Joseph Kesselring's "Arsenic and
Old Lace," is risky business, but The
Ridge-dale Players like to take
chances. Under Mark S. Carley and
Lyn Rubin's direction, the troupe,
now in its 10th season, does more
than get away with it. The produc-
tion is a faithful rendition of a sur-
prisingly durable script. The cast
and crew capture the spirit of Brook-
lyn in its genteel heyday (1940), and
manage to use the fine shadings in
the dialogue to give us a wry, clever
portrait of an eccentric class.

TOM D. Coffey nearly steals the
show in the wonderful role of
Jonathan Brewster, the nephew who
returns to compete with his aunts
over how many murders they can
get away with. Coffey not only looks



Helen Zucker

like Boris Karloff — his hands hang
down past his sleeves in a stranger's
itchy curl — but he talks in an edu-
cated, lethal drawl that is very ef-
fective. He's both alarming and
amusing as he draws his brows to-
gether and turns his scarred cheek
toward us while he gets the drapery
cords to bind his brother.
Stuart Pinsky is equally funny as
Dr. Einstein, the Peter Lorre sad-
sack who has given Jonathan "his
mistake" of a face. Pinsky's ("I
schlipped") accent is an unaccount-
able cross between German, English,
and soft, drunken slurring. A re-
sistant surgeon, criminal, sickle, Pin-
sky gives us a character who is re-
luctant to do anything but bolt out
of the house when he finally gets his un-
likely chance.

The fun of "Arsenic and old
Lace" lies in the fact that everyone
in it is in an unlikely character, yet
we are totally immersed in their
doings from the moment we see Ka-
thy L. Jensen as Abby Brewster
serving tea to the Rev. Dr. Harper,
while she patiently waits to bury
"the gentleman in the window seat."
Jensen's tart voice serves her well.
Jerry Brader turns in an effective
cameo as Dr. Harper, a father who is
concerned about his daughter dating
"a theatre critic." Real concerns,
such as Thom Griffin, playing mad
Teddy Brewster, who grins sweetly
as he yells "Charge!" and dashes up-
stairs, never enter the Reverend's
head.

WE ARE in the realm of Victoria-

na; the world of surface peace, or-
der, charity, and its underside of
darkness and horrific deeds. No act
embodies this dual nature better
than Edie Snook as Martha Brew-
ster, who loves to mix elderberry
wine, sing hymns, and hold funeral
services in the cellar. Ms. Snook's
soft voice, her habit, like Abby's,
of calling everyone "Dear," of liking to
"help" lonely, elderly gentlemen
captures the essence of the play. It's
fitting that Martha has the last
words.

Laura Weidner and Bruce Cornett
as Officer's Klein and Brophy, those
kind-hearted Irish cops who are for-
ever dropping in to stop Teddy from
blowing his bugle and to check up on
the kindly sisters are believable and
funny. So is Jack Abella as the long-
winded, playwright cop whose plot
outline is so boring it puts murderers
to sleep.

Sue Skibicki is sexy, feisty, and
loyal to the bone as Elaine, the Re-
verend's daughter who plans to marry
Mortimer Brewster, no matter
what. Daniel Fuller, as Mortimer,
the only sane Brewster, rushes



Jonathan Brewster puts a menacing hug on Aunt Abby and Aunt Martha (Kitty Jensen and Edie Snook of Troy) in Ridge-dale Players production of "Arsenic and Old Lace."

about, carrying much of the play as
he tries to screen the Brewster sis-
ter's doings and do his job as a dra-
ma critic, and carry on his on-again,
off-again affair. Fuller is an energic
actor. He breathes sanity onto this
original household.
Gene Ewald is fine as the hapless
Mr. Witherspoon.
Kudos to Sarah Conlon and the
crew who gathered the marvelous

props. Jim West and Bill Haycock
and their crews for the very real set,
and the entire ensemble for pulling
off a feat.

Helen Zucker has many years'
experience reviewing for news-
papers and magazines in Michi-
gan, New York and Massachu-
setts.

'The Matchmaker' achieves only mixed success

Performances of the Smith
Theatre production of "The
Matchmaker" continue through
Nov. 10 on the Oakland Commu-
nity College Orchard Ridge Cam-
pus, 27055 Orchard Lake Road in
Farmington Hills. For ticket in-
formation call 471-7700 or 471-
7687.

In the age-old battle of the sexes,
men only think they're smarter than
women, says the Thornton Wilder
comedy "The Matchmaker." As cur-
rently presented by the Smith The-
atre-Guild at Oakland Community
College's Orchard Ridge campus, the
play achieves only mixed success.

The farcical mix-ups of the second
act work reasonable well, but many
of Wilder's rich witticisms are given
throw-away deliveries. While a few
of the principals are fine, numerous
inexperienced actors in supporting
roles are as flat as the show's barely
existent sets.

"THE MATCHMAKER" is better
known in its musical form, "Hello,
Dolly!", and the plots are nearly
identical. The title character is Dolly
Levy (Michelle Howie), an eminently



Barbara Michals

practical widow who sets her cap for
wealthy businessman Horace Van-
dergelder (Earl C. Brown) and
succeeds in making him think the
match is entirely his idea. Along the
way, she also patches up several
other affairs of the heart.

Howie is brimming over with Dolly's
irrepressible spunk, but her vo-
cal intonations never seem to vary
one bit.

Brown is fairly convincing as the
crusty, tight-fisted, chauvinistic
Vanderghelder who mistreats his
clerks, bullies his niece, and gener-
ally grows at everyone. Addressing
the audience with the self-assurance
of the very rich, Vanderghelder pro-
claims that "99 percent of the world
are fools, and the rest of us are in
great danger of contagion."

One nice touch from director Bill
Sharpe is having each one of the sev-
eral characters who directly address

the audience step down from the
stage and walk among the viewers,
and the spotlight that keeps up well
with the actors.

June Wynn is poised, winsome,
and bubbly as Mrs. Molly, the young
widow who starts out as Dolly's
competition, but instead becomes ro-
mantic ally involved with Vander-

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gelder's chief clerk, Cornelius
(Derek Crook).
CROOK is satisfactorily amusing
as the befuddled young clerk, who
along with his assistant Barnaby
(Nathan P. Smith), sets out for a day
of adventure, and gets far more than
he bargained for. Smith has a real
comic flair, with his delivery, facial

expressions, and body English all
used to maximum effect.
Despite Gail Bohacok's very at-
tractive costumes, this production of
"The Matchmaker" is badly lacking
in polish and style. Awkwardly cast-
ing two women into minor male
roles only adds further to the show's
difficulties.



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