

# Neil Simon comedy, roast beef make good pair

By HELEN ZUCKER

If you like a generous slice of beef tenderloin along with your Neil Simon, you will enjoy Detroit Country Day School's benefit dinner-theater performance of "Star Spangled Girl."

The dinner begins with cabernet sauvignon and an excellent Caesar salad. It is followed by a well-prepared slice of medium-rare roast beef with mushroom sauce, baked potato, sour cream, broccoli normandie, and small leaves of bread. The bread is warm, buttery and good.

Coffee and a torte le monde with lemon cream ends the pleasant meal. The kitchen staff at Detroit Country Day is to be commended. Decor is done by the Mother's Association, and students amiably fill the parts of waiters, waitresses and busboys.

Simon's bouncy comedy about a liberal young publisher, his writer-friend and ally, and a girl as square as they make them in small Southern towns still plays well, despite a few dated '60s references.

RONNIE CLEMMER is agreeable as Andy Hobart, publisher, editor, billing department, layout crew, accounting department and managerial staff of "Fallout" magazine. And he is believable as a casual, sexy guy who goes motorcycling, flying and water-skiing with his ancient landlady.

He has a nice, easy-going quality that goes well with Simon's quick-witted, relaxed dialogue. The colloquial, playful language seems especially suited to the kind of nonchalant, off-hand, almost throwaway delivery Clemmer uses.

Jim Kottler as Norman Cornell, the versatile, overimaginative roommate and writer who fills the show's (typical) of 14 different writers, has a clear voice and a kind of bearlike, clomping energy.

A touch of the poet would add a necessary bit of high-wire tension and manic lunacy to Kottler's performance. Norman is a person who wrestles with his imagination constantly. As a writer in control of his material, he has ample space to use it. As a young man head over heels in love, his imagination has ample room to control Norman.

He is the sort of person who has his own version of reality; everything he does turns out upside down. (Norman's real universe is the typewritten page.) His worldly universe is a source of astonishment to "normal people" like Sophie. Most people

ties himself to the typewriter to knock out an entire issue of Fallout and all ends well.

"Star Spangled Girl" may not be Neil Simon at his lunatic best, but

even Simon's weaker scripts are funnier than most.

The set, a combination of apartment and office, is imaginative. Three piled-up truck tires become a table. Laurel

& Hardy posters lend atmosphere, and a paste-up table, desk, typewriter and pop bottles give the feel of a bachelor's pad-office.

Sanity Productions Dinner Theatre begins at 7:30 p.m. There will be performances on Friday and Saturday, Feb. 10 and 11, at the Learning Center on the main campus of Detroit Country Day.

## Review

respond to Norman with a fine edge of incredulity, indeed, near-hysteria in their voices.

KOTTLER IS endearing at times, but Simon's creation is a fanciful odd couple, odd roommate, odd young man. Norman has wings, and his wings constantly brush against people's shins and principles. He is clumsy where others are graceful, graceful where others are clumsy.

Joan Clemmer is a stalwart Sophie Rauchmeyer, loyally defending whatever she thinks is being insulted. Whether anyone is really insulting her home truths is quite beside the point. The flag and apple pie are only the beginning of Sophie's long list of undebatable virtues.

Ms. Clemmer renders her lines with energy and conviction. She helps make Norman's love-splattered spell both believable and ludicrous. She is best at her Olympic descriptions. Describing herself as "Sophie Rauchmeyer who came in fifth in the Montreal Olympics and who can't go home to Honycutt in disgrace," she is quite beside herself.

Her sense of having let Honycutt, and by extension, America, down by having "come in behind an Arab, a little girl who trained in the desert!" is lovely.

She communicates unspeakable shame. She is a girl who does not realize how ludicrous it is to be ashamed of being the fifth best swimmer in the world Olympics. Ms. Clemmer seems to understand Simon's lively sense of the ludicrous.

A FEW LINES such as "Was LBJ on LSD?" leave a strange polynacy in the air. It is hard to believe that the '60s happened such a short time ago. One has the sense of the '60s having taken place as long ago as the Gay Nineties. Moments like these are few, however.

For the most part, this engaging love triangle goes off without a hitch. Since love triangles happen in every decade, the basic story plays as smoothly as any well-done version of "Romeo and Juliet." Andy and Sophie, "all wrong together," yet quite right together—get together at the end.

Norman winds out of his spell, and

## Women's vista beyond game shows

By ETHEL SIMMONS

Is there an alternative to the daytime game shows?

Gerri Lange thinks there is, and it's the new weekly series "Turnabout," which she hosts on the PBS network. The half-hour show debuted Monday on Channel 56 at 2:30 p.m., with a repeat scheduled Saturday at 5:30 p.m.

During a recent stop in Detroit, Ms. Lange was interviewed at the Hotel Pontchartrain. She is an energetic woman, bursting with positive feelings for "Turnabout."

"It's not a typical woman's show," she explained. "It's about changing lifestyles. Women are handling family finances, banking. There's the stress of changing lifestyles."

Women are taking on the same jobs as men. The show provides information for men as well.

MANY OF THE shows feature celebrities talking about women from a woman's perspective. On the first show, opera star Beverly Sills discusses the challenge of juggling career and family life.

"Turnabout" originated in San Francisco two years ago as "Womantime & Co." Ms. Lange said, "We were local, KQED-TV, and got a Nielsen rating the first time out. At night, we got a big audience for reruns."

According to Ms. Lange, at that time a lot of men were out of work in California, and the audience included many men. Also helping to pull in viewers were such subjects as contraception and vasectomies.

"We started to give information they weren't getting anywhere."

Two Emmy Awards were among awards received by the local show.

Under the new title "Turnabout," 26 segments will be shown.

The second show, "Unfit America," will include an interview in which Bill

lie Jean King talks about competitiveness in sports.

Later in the series, Shirley Temple Black, child star who became an ambassador in Africa, and versatile performer Shirley MacLaine, who started as a dancer, will talk about transitions in their lives.

THERE ALSO are interviews with "plain housewives and mothers" in the show's magazine format.

"We talk to ordinary people who have changed their lives. You can't always talk to movie stars," Ms. Lange said. "You have to have people the viewers can relate to."

Other subjects to be discussed soon on "Turnabout" include "The New Reformation," about women in the church; "For Safety's Sake," how women can protect themselves against physical assault; "Diet Mania," eating patterns and a visit to California's posh Golden Door health salon, and "Not So Petty Cash," women and finances.

"We don't preach or give value judgments," Ms. Lange said. "We give people information so they can make the choices. That's all the good life is—increased choices."

Talking about her own life, Ms. Lange called herself "the original re-entry." Now 53, she went back to school at the age of 36.

"I HAVE three kids—27, 29 and 30—and I'm starting a new career, which I think is pretty good," she said. "And I plan to write. I have all kinds of plans."

She said her life experience has been a weird situation, with a career change every two years. All her careers (which so far have included teaching, public relations, TV producing and politics) have been successful.

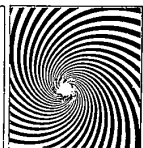
She said, "People say, 'My God, you've done everything!'"



Gerri Lange hosts TV series about changing world of women.

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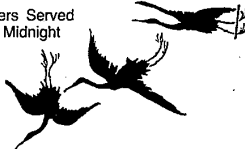
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