

Hilberry repertory leads way



Ellen Burstyn and Alan Alda play lovers who meet once a year for 25 years.



LOUISE SNIDER

Love finds a way out-of-the-way at couple's retreat

Briefly, the story of "Same Time, Next Year" (PG) is this. Two married people meet while each is dining alone at a Mendocino inn.

George, an accountant from New Jersey, is on his annual California visit to do his friend's books. Doris, a young Catholic housewife from Oakland, is bound for her annual retreat.

She "retreats" each year rather than visit her mother-in-law. They bed down together, fall in love, and thereafter meet each year at the same inn.

Ellen Burstyn, recreating her role in Bernard Slade's stageplay and Alan Alda are the devoted lovers. Burstyn is radiant in each of the film's six scenes. She changes from a naive girl to a glamorous woman, to a pregnant housewife, to an assertive hippie, to a successful businesswoman, to a graceful grandmother.

Alda's role doesn't give him as much latitude, and his early scenes have an abrasive edge to them. His frenetic behavior as the guilt-ridden husband becomes grating. In later scenes, he seems closer to the character of George and less a carryover from his television personality.

BOTH PRINCIPALS possess so much warmth and charm they easily dispel any moral qualms a viewer might have. One not only becomes intimately acquainted with Doris and George, with their anxieties, disappointments and hopes, but with their "off-stage" spouses as well.

Perhaps this is why the two of them become so dear to us. In their extramarital affair, author Slade makes a case for marriage. The relationship of Doris and George is durable for the same reason that their marriages are durable. Both are bound by shared experiences that become the foundation of shared memories.

Also, in the various changes and encounters, we can each exploit or rationalize fantasies of our own; yet, their loyalty to their spouses cloaks Doris and George in conventional middle-class morality. It's a case of having your cake and eating it too.

Between their meetings, a photo montage (the work of Chuck Braverman and Ken Rudolph) captures the changing aspects and values of American life. The romance is bracketed in a pop culture condensation of social history.

"Same Time, Next Year" is a talky film that reminds us of its origin as a play. For the same reasons, it is distinguished from many other movies because it gives two fine actors the proper tools to work with — crisp dialogue and heightened language.

Glimpses

NEW RELEASES

AGATHA (PG). Speculation on the 11-day disappearance of Agatha Christie is framed in handsome film with Vanessa Redgrave in title role and Dustin Hoffman as a brass reporter.

THE BRINK'S JOB (PG). William Friedkin directed this comic adventure about the big heist with Peter Falk, Peter Boyle, Warren Oates and Gene Rowlands.

CALIFORNIA SUITE (PG). Neil Simon's comedy of four episodes about guests at the Beverly Hills Hotel. Starry cast includes Jane Fonda and Walter Matthau.

EVERY WHICH WAY BUT LOOSE (PG). Country-western-style action comedy with Clint Eastwood, Sandra Locke and Clyde, the orangutan.

GET OUT YOUR HANDKERCHIEFS (R). Eccentric view of male-female relations as woman's husband and lover work toward her happiness in unconventional way.

THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY (PG). Adventure caper in 1855 as three attractive crooks plan the first robbery of a moving train.

HARDOORE (R). George C. Scott is a religious, midwestern businessman who searches the pore under world for his missing teenage daughter.

ICE CASTLES (PG). "The Other Side of the Mountain" meets "Slow Dancing in the Big City" in teen romance of skater who overcomes handicap.

INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS (PG). Remake of chilling sci-fi thriller about alien invasion in the form of plant pods.

MOVIE, MOVIE (PG). Expert and entertaining spoof of past double bill movies with George C. Scott in fight movie and Bubby Berkeley-type musical.

QUINTET (R). Paul Newman and Bibi Andersson play deadly game of survival in Robert Altman's icy, bizarre film.

SAME TIME, NEXT YEAR (PG). Alan Alda and a radiant Ellen Burstyn in warm, witty tale of an extramarital affair that persists for 25 years.

SUPERMAN (PG). Christopher Reeve plays Big S, Marlon Brando is father and Gene Hackman the villain in this humorous fantasy.

UNCLE JOE SHANNON (PG). Burt Young, and 12-year-old Doug McKean in madcap story of two losers who find each other.

THE WARRIORS (R). Police and street gangs hunt down teenage gang from Coney Island as they fight their way out of Manhattan.

MOVIE RATING GUIDE

- G General audiences admitted.
- PG Parental guidance suggested: All ages admitted.
- R Restricted: Adult must accompany person under 18.
- X No one under 18 admitted.

By JEFF SCHIORR
This is the season, if ever there was one, to catch Wayne State University's Hilberry repertory theater.

Graduate students — all but three of whom have at least one year's experience behind them at the Hilberry — lead a veteran company in the latest addition to this season's repertory offering, the hilarious "Chemin de Fer." The students are Cynthia Dozier, Richard Gustin, Jim Birdsall, Erick Devine and Barbara Acker.

Typical of playwright Georges Feydeau, this is a romp dealing with the ins and outs of marital infidelity, in turn-of-the-century Paris. Dozier and Gustin are joined by first-year Hilberryite Neil Thackaberry Jr. in the three principal roles.

"Chemin de Fer" marks the successful debut of director Anthony Schmitt, who joined the theater staff this season after eight years of teaching and directing at the University of Wisconsin in Stevens Point.

"Chemin de Fer," like most French farces, gets cumbersome explaining the plot, but is relatively easy to follow when watching Francine Chanel (Cynthia Dozier) is involved with Fedot (Richard Gustin), her first lover and second husband.

Chanel (Neil Thackaberry) is her first — and unsuspecting — husband, who later follows amorous paths of his own. From there it gets complicated.

THACKABERRY'S CHANAL is a very proper, self-assured, pompous businessman who rents an upstairs

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room to his wife's lover, Fedot. Gustin brings great facial expressiveness and a bouncing, energetic, head-over-heels portrait to this instigator of the various triangles concocted by his playwright namesake.

(Feydeau takes great delight in having numerous members of the cast, upon being introduced to "Fedot," confuse him with "that great playwright" who, of course, has authored the very words being spoken. This is one of several side avenues Feydeau uses for humor; another being absurd dialogue — e.g., "There's been an accident!" "But how can that be? Accidents don't just happen!" — to balance the otherwise heavy slapstick emphasis.)

It has been a delight to watch Ms. Dozier in excellent performances over the last several years. She has proven versatile, clear-voiced and brilliant in absorbing whatever character she is wearing. As Francine, she expresses propriety, devility, indignation, anguish and coquettishness easily and professionally. One can't help but think the Hilberry's ingenue is ready for big things.

Perhaps part of that conviction comes from the timing, interplay and comfortable assistance the other veteran members lend. There is not a missed line, a dropped stitch, a misplaced step. The Hilberry cast is a smooth-function-

ing unit and all look better because of their fellow actors.

When a chair, kicked over during a chase scene, breaks, Gustin doesn't miss a beat, declaring, "Even the furniture around here is breaking up." It fits right into the dialogue.

THE CAST, which participates in the moving of props and furniture during the two scene changes in each of the two acts, even received applause for its efficiency from the WSU alumni audience which made up most of the first-night viewers.

Jim Birdsall is Hubertin, a middle-aged businessman who can't hold his li-

quor and has an annoying habit of firing guns at all hours of the night. Erick Devine's Coustoullu is a competent legislator except when he is smitten by love and becomes a bumbling oaf.

Other creditable performances are turned in by Fedot's wife Sophie (Barbara Acker), the austere police commissioner Panteloup (Mark Robbins), the servant Etienne (Richard Bradshaw) who makes the most of one great slapstick moment catching a thrown melon in the stomach that almost knocks him over, and the fawning Belgeance (Gerald Roe), who plays the consummate loser.



"Chemin de Fer," a farce by Georges Feydeau, is playing the Hilberry, with Cynthia Dozier (left), Neil Thackaberry Jr. (center) and Richard Gustin in leading roles.

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