

# Cast captures quality in 'Romantic Comedy'

Performances of Bernard Slade's "Romantic Comedy" continue through May 9 at the Birmingham Theatre, 211 S. Woodward. Performances are at 8 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays, 7 p.m. Sundays and 2 p.m. Wednesdays and Sundays. For ticket information, phone 644-3533.

By Helen Zucker  
special writer

The Birmingham Theatre production of Bernard Slade's "Romantic Comedy" is a winner. Slade's play is more than clever, it's genuinely funny — filled with delectable one-liners that come naturally out of the script — and the cast is intelligent enough to capture the special quality, the special warmth Slade feels for his characters.

Directed by Tom Troupe, "Romantic Comedy" is the most professional production I've seen at the Birmingham Theatre. If the pacing is stepped up an iota, "Romantic Comedy" should be the smash hit of the '81-'82 season.

All the machinery works so that you don't see it. The hubbub of wedding

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guests in a far room is pitched just right. The set by David Weller works beautifully. Somehow all those vases and baskets that shouldn't line the bookshelves of a sophisticated study look right.

**THE WINDOWS**, doors and anterooms are terrific. No one got in anyone's way, despite folding massage tables and typewriters on the floor.

But it's the actors who make "Romantic Comedy" a memorable evening. Noel Harrison does a wonderful job as Jason Carmichael, the comedy writer from the East End of London who marries an ambassador's daughter because her father "has a flag on his car."

Harrison gives us a portrait of a talented, witty man with a thorough knowledge of his job (writing and doctoring plays) and lots of selfish habits. Carmichael ignores his kids (We don't

pley them. They get lots of attention from his wife and partner). He's a fop, a dandy, and a workaholic who loves the theater.

Bernard Slade has a wonderful eye for foibles, and Harrison makes the most of wonderful bits like not sitting down before he sees his tailor so he "won't cross." Harrison makes all of Carmichael's relationships believable.

Carol Lynley is warm, screwy, intelligent and wonderful as Phoebe Craddock, the schoolmarm from Vermont who becomes Carmichael's partner on his wedding day. I was alarmed when Lynley bounced into Carmichael's study looking like Flopsy, Mopsy and Cottontail rolled into one. (Carmichael tells her she "dresses like a garage sale.")

**PHOEBE GROWS** from a Vermont girl into a New Yorker who wears a baseball cap, and finally Paris clothes which she exchanges for blue jeans when she meets up with Carmichael again.

This play is beautifully constructed, and the small touches like Phoebe's clothing signal changes. Lynley has an



Noel Harrison and Carol Lynley make their characters come alive with warmth and wit in Bernard Slade's neatly constructed play about playwright-collaborators who become romantically involved.

appealing way of delivering dialogue sets as if they were short public speeches. It adds to her lovable eccentricity.

Carol Bruce is dandy as Blanche Dailley, the throaty, loyal agent. Bruce has good timing and a crusty manner be-

neath which beats a heart of gold. She's deft, handing over hot soup so that you feel it burning her fingers.

Laura Beattie is intelligent and frighteningly competent as Allison, Carmichael's politician wife. Director Tom Troupe steps in for a nice turn as

Leo Janowitz, the reporter who takes Phoebe to Paris, and Aida Berylin is fine as Kate Mallory, the vamp-actress with her dress on backwards.

Enjoy.

# Will-O-Way's production of 'The Shadow Box' falls flat

The Will-O-Way Repertory Theatre production of "The Shadow Box" by Michael Cristofer continues at 8:30 p.m. Fridays-Saturdays through April 24 at the Eagle Theatre, 13 S. Saginaw, Pontiac. Tickets are \$8. For more information call 644-4418.

By Margo Parker  
special writer

The Will-O-Way Apprentice Theatre has taken its act on the road to mount a production of Michael Cristofer's "The Shadow Box" at Pontiac's Eagle Theatre. Unhappily, the Eagle's ample staging resources, so lacking in Will-O-

Way's Bloomfield Township home, cannot compensate for the wooden acting and misguided direction exhibited here.

In this two-hour play, there are only perhaps 15 minutes of genuine, believable acting. The rest is unmotivated, cliché, histrionic and embarrassing.

"The Shadow Box" is a gloriously written, Pulitzer-Prize-winning drama centering around three hospice-like cottages on the grounds of a large hospital. Three human beings are dying here with varying degrees of humor, dignity and despair, dragging their loved ones down with them or uplifting them with their courage.

There are five different stages a player go through when he faces

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the fact of his own death: Denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance," is the widely quoted statement used in the playbill. "These stages will last for different periods of time, then will replace each other, or exist at times side by side, but the one thing that usually persists through all these stages is hope."

ONLY OCCASIONALLY can the playwright identify the five stages or the

shining hope in this production of "The Shadow Box." Eileen Keinert comes closest as the frumpy spinster waiting for her querulous mother's death without realizing that she herself is prolonging the agony with an innocent collection of lies that has become impossible to unweave.

Actually, when one considers the performance of Sheila LaVigne as Anger's mother, one almost understands Keinert's dislike. LaVigne's whiny twang sets our teeth on edge from the very first word, showing an appalling

lack of understanding of, or sympathy for, the old and senile. Why director James S. Bennett let her get away with this travesty is beyond guessing.

The most sympathetic family ensemble in this trilogy centers around Melvyn Hardiman as a blue-collar worker whose dreams died long ago and whose body is just now catching up.

Maria Foster as his wife, Maggie, does a good job denying his condition and her feelings about it but doesn't show the transition to acceptance and restored affection.

Part of her problem lies with Hardiman, who never seems in touch with his character's feelings. Hardiman and Foster are handicapped, too, by the staging of director Bennett. He has them clutching each other in stiff, unrealistic embraces whenever he doesn't seem to know what else to do.

Bennett's bad bad blocking wrecks the worst havoc in the menage a trois between a dying writer, his ex-wife and his homosexual lover. With a huge

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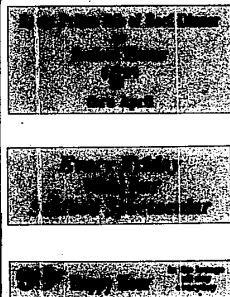
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