

'Constant Wife' nicely recaptures '20s mood

Performances of the Farmington Players production of "The Constant Wife" by W. Somerset Maugham continue Friday-Sunday, Thursday-Sunday, Feb. 9-12, and Thursday-Saturday, Feb. 16-18, at the players' Barn Theatre, 2232 W. 12 Mile Road, Farmington Hills. For ticket information, call the box office at 535-8822.

By Barbara Michals
special writer

"The Constant Wife" is a gentle drawing-room comedy performed with crisp style and skill by the Farmington Players.

The 1920s period piece by W. Somerset

Maugham focuses on the marital infidelities of British upper classes. The play is an early exponent of women's liberation, suggesting a re-evaluation of the marriage state and the old double standard.

The title character, Constance Middleton (Mary Ellen Ward), works very hard pretending not to know of her husband's affair with her best friend and warring off the many well-intentioned friends and relatives who are dying to tell her the juicy details.

When circumstances force Constance to drop her ruse of ignorance, she responds to the situation in surprising and novel ways.

While Constance's mother, a redoubtable British matron (Anne Burton), be-

lieves that infidelity is perfectly natural and acceptable in males, Constance goes several steps further. She sets off to establish her financial as well as emotional independence, all the while cleverly manipulating her husband's responses.

WARD DOES fine work as Constance. A highly articulate heroine reminiscent of George Bernard Shaw's super-women, Constance has brains and good sense that automatically make the male characters look stupid.

Ward has a comfortable stage presence and confident delivery that makes Constance both credible and likeable.

The British accents are handled well by all the players. Everyone enunciates

slowly and precisely, a slight artificiality that works to good advantage here.

Burton is thoroughly convincing as Constance's mother, speaking with conviction and looking every inch the British matron in frumpy suit and large flowered hat.

As the philandering husband, Robert Myers relaxed, mild-mannered approach seems just right. Men are naturally weak, the playwright suggests, and one must make allowances for the poor dears.

Laurie Pokowski is a strong Martha, Constance's younger sister, who is outspoken and highly disdainful of men. Everyone seems to agree that Martha's frankness is not a virtue.

review

MAGGIE EINHAUS is believable as Marie Louise, the bubble-headed, fickle "other woman." Robert Baisdon as her too soft-spoken.

C.M. Noveck III can always be relied on for a polished performance but seems wasted as Bernard, Constance's former suitor. Bernard's opportunist turn from China just when Constance's 15-year marriage seems to be coming unglued makes him a convenient pawn

for Constance to use as needed.

Minor line difficulties at Saturday night's performance were nicely smoothed over, and even a momentary black-out was handled in stride.

Director Ellie Jorgensen can be credited with a very pleasant production, well-paced and skillfully performed. A low-key approach throughout gives the production a pleasing unity.

'The Dining Room' shows lifestyle of vanishing breed

Continued from Preceding Page

Symington and Peter Thomson.

Men of this vanishing species go to Harvard, Dartmouth or Yale, wear wing-tip shoes and marry debutantes of good family. They go to the club for staid camaraderie and always do what is correct, or they make sure no one finds out about what they do that isn't.

The female of the species is the original preppy, before alligator shirts and pink and green stood in for the conservative styles and upbringing that once meant preppy in the East.

A WASP FEMALE can say "tomahawk" without sounding affected and will wear rings of pearls when she becomes a dowager. WASPs believe that tradi-

tional values and rituals are the stays that keep their good life in proper shape.

One of the subculture's rituals began promptly at seven every evening, when dinner was served by the maid in the stately dining room. "But the times, they are a'changing," the entire play by A.R. Gurney Jr. revolves around one set—a grand formal dining room with a long shiny table and crystal chandelier.

A constant stream of characters parade in and out of the dining room. Present and overlap and time is out of order. We see grandfather in his wheelchair doling out money to beseeching grandchildren. Later we see him as a little boy, begging to cut in the dining room with "Mommy and Daddy."

But always there is the dining room, although it, like what it represents, is often under siege. Whippersnapper young architects want to subdivide the room and avoid "all that wasted space" and bickering siblings discuss who should get what, now that Mom has uprooted and gone to Florida.

When the grown actors play children, it's the reminder of Lilly Tomlin as a little girl in her giant rocking chair, and when a gaggle of grownups-turned-child-

dren get the excited wiggles at a birthday party, it's a delight to see Detroit's own Bethany Carpenter as a marvel as she ranges from little kid, Irish maid, gum-chomping teen-ager and sophisticated woman to senile old lady.

ONE SCENE particularly stands out in "The Dining Room." A young college student asks his aunt to explain the fine points of the family's dining service. He takes notes as she rhapsodizes about

pistol-handled silver knives, bone china, Waterford crystal and finger bowls with delicate lemon slices floating in the water.

Then she asks what class all this is for. "Anthropology," he says and explains that the use of finger bowls indicates an absurd fetish for cleanliness. He goes on to find anthropological fault with the variety of forks, spoons and goblets necessary to eat a meal.

It's a masterful scene, as is Jana

Lowry's portrayal of Aunt Harriet's astounded, then affronted expression at her turncoat nephew.

We laugh at the foibles of the staid rich as they scramble, just like the rest of us, to find a new niche in a changing world. In an era of TV dinners and Big Macs, is there still a place for dining formally by candlelight? Yes, if we remember to laugh as we figure out which of the arsenal of forks on the table we're supposed to use first.

Cabaret theater offers weekend shows

The new Warehouse Cabaret Theatre is being presented during January and February by True Grit Inc., dinner theater and restaurant in Homer, Mich. With the exception of two weekends,

All performances are available as dinner theater or show only. For further information call (517) 568-4151. A one-man show starring the Grist's Tim McKanic is "Mark Twain: Sunset

on the Mississippi," which will be featured Jan. 20-22. Music and humor of Noel Coward is offered in "Noel Coward in Two Keys," Jan. 27-29.

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