

# Silliness detracts from play

Performances of the Birmingham Village Players production of "The Trading Post" continue at 8:30 p.m. Friday-Saturday at the playhouse in Birmingham. For ticket information, call 644-2075.

"The Trading Post" is a gentle drama about love and commitment. The current production by the Birmingham Village Players is at times quite touching, at times embarrassingly silly.

In a small Tennessee town, Claudia (Helen Parrish) and Wallace (Don Brown) are a middle-aged couple who have been close friends for 16 years, keeping company regularly at Wednesday movie matinees. Now that Claudia is about to move to Canada to look after an ailing sister, they finally let friendship ripen into romance.

Their first tentative steps are as hesitant and awkward as a teen-ager's, and here is where the drama is most affecting. Each has been married before and forced to raise a child alone. Each has held back from commitment because of their re-



**Barbara Michals**

spective spouse's infidelity, real or hypothetical. Claudia and Wallace are disapproving when their grown children (Dennis Widurek and Sandra Boak) form a relationship literally overnight, its haste a striking contrast to their own slow growth.

To give their own relationship a final nudge forward, Claudia and Wallace trade places, assuming one another's identity to speak as they wish the other would. What should be an emotional catharsis degenerates into slapstick comedy, however.

Claudia and Wallace exchange clothing on stage, not just a symbolic piece but whole outfits, wig to shoes. The cumulative effect is so silly that one feels embarrassment for the actors.

PARRISH and Brown are both highly convincing in the lead roles. Parrish has the sound of the Southern accent perfectly, but her speech rhythm is distressingly slow; a drawl does not necessarily operate at half-speed. Brown's accent isn't quite as Southern, but his rhythm is more natural and relaxed.

Widurek's saucy grin makes him likeable. Jim, Wallace's son. His amorous adventures are a source of embarrassment to this straight-laced father. Sandra Boak is commanding as Katherine, Claudia's restless, angry daughter.

As Louis, a friend of Claudia and Wallace, Larry Sweet is supposed to supply further comedy portraying a recent widower of eccentric behavior. Again, the slow speech rhythm is exaggerated, and the humor is forced and ineffectual.

Diane Evans-Forrest looks much too wholesome to be the "femme fatale" at the town's one nightclub.

For the unsuccessful comedy touches, the script is as much at fault as director Dee Dwellley, but much could be done to better pace deliveries. Slow curtains Saturday night added to the effect of production running on old batteries.

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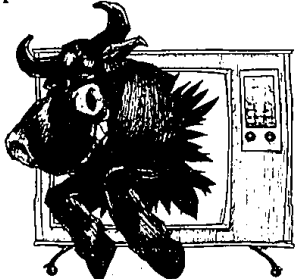
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