

'Isn't It Romantic' is appealing

Performances of the Birmingham Theatre production of "Isn't It Romantic" continue through Sunday, March 17, in Birmingham. For ticket information call the box office at 644-3533.

By Barbara Michaels
special writer

"Isn't It Romantic" by Wendy Wasserstein is a warm, witty comedy about the choices facing contemporary young women. As performed by a capable cast at the Birmingham Theatre, the production compares favorably with its New York counterpart. It is a little gem not to be missed.

Janie Blumberg and Harriet Cornwall, lifelong best friends, are trying to make it on their own in New York City. Coming from very different family backgrounds, each carries a set of romantic but opposite ideals. Each girl must compromise and accept that "life is a series of negotiations."

Janie (Eleanor Reissa) has been

raised to seek the traditional goals of marriage and a family. On the verge of obtaining that ideal with "a nice young doctor," she finds the prospect suffocating.

Harriet (Marilyn McIntyre), raised by a hard-boiled business executive mother, seeks a successful career and romance without commitment. But when the right opportunity arises, she re-examines her feminist views.

REISSA is enormously appealing as the frizzy-haired, ruffled Janie who lives in baggy overalls and out of packing crates. Janie's wisecracking, self-deprecating humor is her defense against her overly attentive parents and domineering boyfriend. Reissa has a delightful comic delivery.

Janie's first encounter with a raw chicken is hilarious, as is her reaction to the Russian immigrant cabdriver her parents present to her as a potential husband.

As Harriet, McIntyre projects plenty of vulnerability beneath her business suits and cool blond exterior.

or. Frightened of emulating her mother's lonely life, she wants to grab for what the women's magazines call "having it all."

Elfin Lynn Cohen is outstanding as Janie's mother Tasha, an unforgettable comic character. Far from the stereotype of the Jewish mother as homebody, Tasha shuns the kitchen in favor of coffee shop carry-outs. A middle-aged dancing school devotee with the energy of a dervish, she darts about in leotards and puzzles at Janie's comparative lethargy.

Ann Flood is convincing as Lillian, Harriet's aggressive and emotionally reserved mother. Reeking of sophisticated glamour during the working television reruns and recognizes she has made choices to get where she is.

MICHAEL MINOR is perfect as Paul Stuart, the egotistical womanizer who is Harriet's office romance. Stuart makes love without

rumpling his perfect coiffure and keeps his relationships painfully shallow.

Allan Wasserman is effective as Marty Sterling, the seemingly perfect young doctor ardently pursuing Janie. Trying just a little too hard to return to the old values and traditions of his childhood, Sterling fails to understand that today's woman no longer comfortably fits the old molds.

Like its New York counterpart, the Birmingham production includes taped phone messages from a number of Broadway stars and an immensely clever use of the stagehands. Well-integrated into the action of the play, the stagehands take on character and earn quite a lot of laughs.

"Isn't It Romantic" abounds with winning characters, clever dialogue and a marvelous understanding of the opposing pressures on contemporary women. Under director Susan Rosenstock, the Birmingham production offers this charming comedy in a nearly perfect package.



Marilyn McIntyre (left) is Harriet Cornwall and Ann Flood is Janie Blumberg, two friends with very different ideas about what they want from the men in their life, in "Isn't It Romantic," at the Birmingham Theatre.

E. Dwight Wellborn's simple sets work well, except for the big green blob that is supposed to represent Central Park. The engaging music

often used between scenes nearly blinds the audience from its seat, a defect that should be easy to remedy.

Travel film shows San Diego

Former Associated Press Correspondent Hal McClure will present his new travel film lecture "San Diego Adventure" as the next presentation on

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