

# More than risque business

Performances of "A Flea in Her Ear" presented by Meadow Brook Theatre continue through Sunday, Feb. 22, on the Oakland University campus in Rochester Hills. For ticket information, call the box office at 377-3300.

By Cathie Breidenbach  
special writer

Meadow Brook's energetic production of George Feydeau's "A Flea in Her Ear" raises the art of double entendre to new heights.

Literally translated the French phrase means "double hearing." Feydeau goes beyond usual risque innuendo and plays with sounds in general, with languages, even with speech impediments. Nothing is sacred and the stage ricochets with the humor of communication run amok.

Make no mistake, "Flea" is unmitigated nonsense from start to finish. It's pure farce with a frenetic second act superbly choreographed by director Carl Schurr.

The plot is launched when well-to-do Haymonds Chandise (Sherry Skinner) takes a notion that her husband has been fooling around (she gets a flea in her ear). She and her pal Lucienne (Brigid Cleary) cook up

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a plan to catch him at his extramarital pleasures. Director Carl Schurr gives each character a distinctive style, and he gives many a distinguishing sound as well. The doctor (Robert Spencer) growls like a motor cycle being kick-started whenever his thoughts turn to the pleasure of the flesh. Such thoughts are seldom far from his mind, so he gets to rev his engines often.

The doctor carries on a memorable, wordless conversation with Camille (Paul DeBoy), a young man whose cleft palate interferes with his speech. The two don't need words to describe the delights at the Coq D'Or, a disreputable hotel. Libidinous noises tell the whole story.

"Flea in Her Ear" is an urbane French farce that makes fun of an international collection of crazies. There's the Spaniard (Henry Jordan) with a lip that intensifies when he thinks his wife has propositioned another man. He leaps around the stage waving pistols and hissing Latin in ultimata. Phillip Locher plays the slapstick part of a lecherous Prussian patron of the Coq D'Or, and James Anthony plays a French dandy with an overdose of vanity and a shortage of acupules.

Feydeau is a master of sight gags as well as sound gags. He creates a pair of look-alike characters, one a wine servant, the other Raymond's distinguished husband. Wil Love plays well the double part of the husband and the servant Poch. Another sight gag, a trick bed at the Coq D'Or, sees plenty of action spinning its occupants out of sight to an ad-



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joining bedroom.

In the original version, the play is set in Paris just past the turn of the century, but Meadow Brook inexplicably decided to set the play in the '20s instead. The art-deco drawing room of the Chandise house sadly looks more like a retrograde disco than a place where people live. The decision to change the play's setting was unfortunate because set designer Peter Hicks has always excelled at re-creating turn-of-the-century el-

egance on the Meadow Brook stage. His version of Parisian decor in the '20s doesn't measure up. Despite the peculiar set, the play's good humor thrives, thanks to an expert cast and splendid pacing.

Cathie Breidenbach of West Bloomfield has always loved theater. A former high-school English teacher, she works in public relations, advertising and as a freelance writer.

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