

As Barney Cashman, he's a lovable rascal

"The Last of the Red Hot Lovers," presented by the Birmingham Village Players, continues at 8:30 p.m. Friday-Saturday at the playhouse in Birmingham. For reservations call 644-3074 anytime.

By Barbara Michaels
special writer

Fine performances by the Birmingham Village Players sharpen the pleasure of "Last of the Red Hot Lovers," one of Neil Simon's lesser comedies.

At 47, Barney Cashman (Don Brown), proprietor of a Manhattan seafood restaurant, decides to try his first extramarital fling after 23 years of fidelity. Barney strikes out three times at bat. While he does successfully learn to loosen up, he chooses women who are increasingly neurotic.

Brown makes Barney a thoroughly lovable rascal. He exerts at being perpetually complused by the various unexpected demands the women make on him. His expressive face, especially set off by bushy eyebrows, registers a gamut of emotions. Valiantly he struggles to be suave while worrying about his fingers smelling from seafood.

In December, Barney meets Elaine, a liberated swinger whose straightforward approach leaves him wriggling like a fish out of water. Diane

review

D'Agostino is perfect as the flippant, hard-boiled restaurant customer who has no patience for Barney's need to warm up their relationship with conversation. Her glib delivery is polished and flawless.

In August, an encounter in the park brings Bobbi, a very hip, aspiring actress who is always being imperiled by kinky kooks. She virtually forces Barney to "mellow out," a pure comic contradiction. Debi Diehl-Jackson is very believable as Bobbi, full of nervous restlessness and dumb-blond vocal inflections.

Getting somewhat desperate, in September Barney tries Jeanette, a very neurotic housewife and long-time friend of his wife. Jeanette dishes out large portions of gloom and depression. She is so uptight that Barney's main goal becomes to get her to unclench her hand. Joan Britton is a very credible Jeanette and resists the temptation to overplay the role for broad comedy.

Director William Haycock achieves a maximum effort from his performers. While there are flashes of Simon's comic genius in the exchanges between Barney and Elaine, the remaining two acts just do not come up to Simon's usual level of witty repartee.

Barbara Michaels teaches high school English and journalism in Southfield. A theater critic for the last 13 years, she is an inveterate playgoer who regularly catches up on all the New York productions.

a counting for taste

D. Gustibus

Food's good at the Mayflower

Your traveling taster visits area eateries and rates them on a 100-point scale. Up to 30 points are awarded for ambience, which includes general atmosphere and service; 55 points for food, and 15 points for price/value rating. A total count of 59 points or less indicates a restaurant is not recommended; 60-74 points signify from passing to good; 75-89 points designate very good with some extraordinary features, and 90-100 points show that a very special dining experience awaits you.

THE MAYFLOWER HOTEL, 455 S. Main, Plymouth (452-1020), sets out to recreate the feeling of Plymouth, Mass., in colonial times. A replica of the Mayflower, Pilgrim scenes on the walls and even the lighting contribute to the effect. In other areas of the hotel, too, there are objects from earlier times, which makes it fun to browse a bit before or after your meal. The main dining room is a comfortable place, clean and neat, with fresh flowers on the tables. No tablecloths are used, and the casual setting attracts a very nice clientele of all ages, some in suits and some in sweaters. We visited the restaurant on a Sunday night when the menu is slightly different from other nights, with a more limited selection. Hostesses were pleasant, and we were seated promptly. Dinner took an hour and three quarters. General Atmosphere — 15 points maximum. Points awarded — 13.

Our waitress, friendly but sometimes overly familiar, was not the best one in the dining room. Other tables were better attended than ours as we waited 25 minutes for water. In fact, the busing was generally very poor. Water was never refilled; dishes were not cleared even after our repeated requests. Nonetheless, once our waitress took the order, the food flew out at us, sometimes before we were ready for it. Thus, the actual eating of the dinner took only about half the time that we were there, and the rest of the time was spent waiting to order and to pay. Service — 15 points maximum. Points awarded — 8.

Generous portions, lots of courses and plenty of good food marked our meal. Included with the entree are soup, salad, vegetable and potato. As a result, we did not order a separate appetizer. The chicken rice soup was hot, hearty and richly flavored, with plenty of chicken and vegetables. The salad, which was mostly lettuce, was fresh but not as cold as it could have been. The house dressing, a creamy garlic, was mild but very tasty. One of the highlights of the meal was the superb nut bread which was deliciously flavored and not at all heavy. The other rolls were also fresh and enjoyable. The drinks were about average in price and strength. Before the Entree — 15 points maximum. Points awarded — 13.

The Sunday dinner offerings are all fairly "traditional" in the sense

that they are American cuisine without a lot of fancy sauces or additions. Roast duck (\$11) was a special, which we enjoyed very much in spite of the greasy-looking gravy on the duck. Once the gravy was removed, the duck proved tender and juicy. A 16-ounce T-bone steak (\$15.25) was another special. Although it came somewhat overcooked, the meat was nicely flavored and quite tender. The orange roughy (\$13) was fresh but had a slight fishy taste. It was good but not memorable. The other outstanding dish of the evening was the corn custard, a concoction with cinnamon that was unusual and delicious. The green beans were cooked properly but did not have the unique appeal of the corn. The whipped potatoes did not have much taste. Entree, Vegetables and Garnishes — 30 points maximum. Points awarded — 22.

The rice pudding (\$2) was a nice dessert for this meal. It was creamy and rich, with plenty of raisins. The only objection we had was that it was topped with canned whipping

cream, an unwanted addition. The cherry pie (\$1.50) was "colonial" but not anything special. Another slice of nut bread and some more corn custard would have made a better dessert. Dessert — 10 points maximum. Points awarded — 6.

We received a lot of food, ranging from adequate to very good, for \$44 per couple with tip. We left the restaurant both full and satisfied. Price/Value — 15 points maximum. Points awarded — 13.

A Counting for Taste — 100 points maximum. Total points awarded: 76. The Mayflower is an inviting and pleasant place for families or couples. Better service would make it special.

D. Gustibus welcomes your reactions, comments and suggestions of favorite restaurants in the Observer & Eccentric area. Write to D. Gustibus, in care of Observer & Eccentric, Entertainment Department, P.O. Box 3503, Birmingham 48012.

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