



**Helen Zucker**

## Farmington Players excels with Simon's view of Chekhov

Performances of "The Good Doctor" by Neil Simon, presented by the Farmington Players, continue through Saturday, May 16, at the players' Barn Theatre in Farmington Hills. For ticket information call 626-5061 anytime.

The Farmington Players production of Neil Simon's "The Good Doctor," directed by Bill Salisbury, is marvelous theater.

The cast of five is polished, consistently funny and makes the most out of what may prove to be one of Simon's most durable works.

The play is based on stories by Anton Chekhov, one of the finest short story writers. Simon has fashioned a series of vignettes that are as fresh and delightful in 1987 as they were when Chekhov published them in the late 19th century. Simon has not played havoc with Chekhov, and the Farmington troupe gives Simon its all.

Ralph Rosati, an actor well-known for his ability to move with terrific ease from one character to another, draws us into the play. He wears a worker's cap, a long white scarf wrapped round his throat and a black coat. Holding a quill pen, he writes away at a small desk. Rosati makes us feel the chill of a heartless room and the heat of a writer's mind in high gear.

ROSATI WEAVES in and out of

the 11 vignettes the play contains and manages to be witty, poignant and thoroughly entertaining whenever he appears. Whether playing the writer, an aged lover, a seducer of other men's wives or a hapless bank manager, Rosati's quick wits are a pleasure to watch.

Jan Salisbury, an actress with lots of experience, shines as an upper-class mother who is so good at mathematics she manages to cheat her children's governess out of her wages in order to teach the girl a lesson in spunk.

Salisbury has a clear, wonderful ringing voice, and she's just as good as a lower-class woman who manages to drive a banker to a nervous breakdown.

C.M. Novess III is deft, clever and totally believable in all his roles. Novess has the best accent in the troupe. He manages to convince the audience that he's Russian by using inflections rather than an accent. He moves with assurance, and he's dazzling as the waterfront man who

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gets a gentleman to pay to see him drown, with unpredictable consequences.

KIRK HANLEY is hilarious as the government clerk who dies of a sneeze blown out of proportion. He's equally hilarious as the new dentist in surgery. Hanley has a staunch look about him, a way with a response and always seems the young husband he's often called upon to play.

Debbie Nymshack has a lovely, shining face and does a beautiful job as the young actress who walks from Odessa to Moscow to read from "Three Sisters." As a wife who outwits a Don Juan, a hapless governess, and a presence in this experienced troupe, Nymshack is an add.

The bare-bones set serves nicely, and the costumes, especially the incredible hats, are terrific.

## Main Stage Theatre Guild needs more work on show

Performance of "Harvey" by the Main Stage Theatre Guild continues at 8 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, April 30 through May 2, and Thursday-Saturday, May 14-16, in the Little Theater at Seaholm High School, Birmingham. For ticket information, call 469-7548 or 542-1472, Mondays-Thursdays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

A new player on the Detroit theater scene jumped into the ring Friday at Seaholm High School in Birmingham.

Main Stage Theatre Guild, which bills itself as a "semi-professional" company, gave its maiden performance with Mary Chase's "Harvey." Unfortunately, Main Stage's debut was distinctly unmemorable, marred by clumsy amateurishness and a woeful lack of polish.

"Harvey," the slightly tipsy tale of amiable alcoholic Elwood P. Dowd and his six-foot-tall invisible rabbit pal, can still amuse despite its years. But to run this old jalopy takes fast footwork, canny timing and well-drawn, dotty characters. Main Stage's "Harvey" shows few of these.

It isn't all disaster. Richard T. Williams as ineffectual, unfocused Elwood Dowd gives a winsomely benevolent performance with acceptable mime skills and comic timing. Guild president and producer/director C.J. Nodus blusters well as the nasal psychiatrist, Dr. Chumley. Assistant director and Main Stage vice president Lisa Andrews provides needed verve as Nurse Kelly. VETA LOUISE, Elwood's dotty "normal" sister, is perhaps the real mainstay of the show. She is played



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by Connie Fox, who sweetens the old society lady into a sort of upper-class Edith Bunker.

She gamely soldiers through a swamp of flubbed lines, missed cues, clumsy blocking and clunky timing from the balance of the cast, most kindly described as "amateur."

Perhaps inevitably — when both the director and the assistant are on stage much of the time — technical production is rough. The dark reddish set, which doubles as Dowd's library and the asylum office, looks flimsy and dilapidated. Wood braces are plainly glimpsed through set doors.

"Harvey" is a museum piece, yet costumes and props are contemporary. The telephone continues to buzz after the actors answer it. Scene changes are done via black-outs, which stretch interminably.

In short, this play is woefully unready for presentation to an audience. From the blown lines, obvious "cover-up" ad-libs and awkwardness, to the technical crudeness, "Harvey" is simply unprepared.

Metropolitan Detroit needs more theater groups, but Main Stage should slow down and rethink its ambitious 1987-88 schedule. Hasty, under-rehearsed, slapdash productions do everyone a disservice.

Birmingham resident Chuck Moss is a freelance writer who writes on a variety of subjects including a personal column for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

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