

Ridgedale Players polishes 'The Dining Room'

Performances of "The Dining Room," presented by the Ridgedale Players of Troy, continue through Sunday, May 14. For ticket information, call Donna Backus at 644-8328.



Helen Zucker

By Helen Zucker
special writer

A fine cast lights up the Ridgedale Players production of A.R. Gurney's "The Dining Room." Under the direction of Hal Saffron and Jacqueline Saltz, six spirited actors take on the interlocking collage of scenes that make up "The Dining Room" and manage to imbue Gurney's work with grace, charm, humor and intelligence. A lesser cast could not have made this production as timely as the Ridgedale Players has.

The play first turned up on the boards in New York in 1981 and, comparing this production to the original one, time seems to have given the script resonance and poignancy. Ridgedale Players understands

every nuance in this work about changing American mores. The actors wing their lines across the footlights with precision, speed and a high sense of wit.

Gwen Elbert, a chic, pretty woman in black, plays the First Actress. She is as adept playing the real estate agent who opens the play as she is playing a boy of characters ranging from a frustrated society matron trying to get her unwilling granddaughter to "come out," to a suburban wife trying to conduct an affair while throwing a birthday party for a 5-year-old.

ELBERT EXUDES energy, but her only off moment is a cameo of a retiring maid. She simply looks too

classy. Elbert's scene as a aunt showing off her finger bowls, glass and china is marvelous. She rises to a fine rage and it's every inch the insulted aunt, who throws her nephew out of the house.

Frank Gollon as the Third Actor is wonderful. A handsome fellow, he captures the essence of WASPdom, playing a father who fumingly tells his family to stay at home while he rushes down to the club to take care of a family scandal.

Gollon is terrific in the scene between the aunt (Elbert) and the nephew who has come down from Amherst to photograph her things as an "anthropology project." The nephew raises his aunt's temper when he tells her he is studying WASPs as a "vanishing culture." His analysis of her collection is the heart of the play.

Eugenia Garner, an actress with great diction, does a grand job as the Second Actress. She is remarkably believable as a bored daughter and especially fine as the matron who throws a dinner party with place cards while trying to talk an ancient cook into working forever.

Garner has her best scene under the table that stands in the center of the dining room, around which most of the action takes place. She gets under the table with an ex-stock-

broker who has become a carpenter (exuberantly played by Kim Fox) and discovers that the table she thought was valuable is less than 100 years old. The two put a nail here and a wedge there, and Garner decides to be the carpenter's assistant.

JULIE KLOCK TILLOTSON is marvelous as the Third Actress. She has the malleable face of a quick-change artist and is hilarious as Wilkie, the 5 year old, quietly tragic as the old woman who wants to "go home" to a home that's no longer there; and very moving as the maid who explains to "darling Michael," a small, protesting boy (well played by James R. West) that, yes, she wants to leave domestic service, work in a factory and get married.

Despite her accent that is a blend of Irish and Swedish, it's no trouble

believing Tilloston's portrayal.

James R. West as the First Actor is particularly fine playing the grandfather who watches everyone "leaving the nest and taking a piece of the nest egg." West catches the poignancy of a self-made man seeing the fruits of his labor tossed away by two generations who have had life too easy.

Kim Fox as the Second Actor moves energetically among his many roles. He has an alert, expressive face. His best scenes are as the carpenter under the table and as a fledgling son listening to his father organize a funeral service.

Helen Zucker has many years' experience reviewing for newspapers and magazines in Michigan, New York and Massachusetts.

table talk

Mother's Day

Traditional Mother's Day Champagne Brunch will be served from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday at the Hotel Pontchartrain in Detroit. A carving

station will offer baked glazed ham, roast turkey and corned brisket of beef. Brunch will be available at the Top of the Pontch, Ontario Room and the Versaille Ballroom. The buffet is \$15.95 for adults, \$7.95 for children

under 10. Reservations are required.

Hillside buffets

Two buffets will be served on Mother's Day at the Hillside in Plymouth. A brunch buffet is offered

from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and dinner buffet 2:30-6 p.m. The brunch is \$14.95 for adults, \$7.95 for children 6-12 and free to children 5 and under. The dinner is \$15.95 for adults, \$8.95 for children 6-12 and free to children 5 and under. Reservations are required.

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