



Mary Jane Doerr

'They're Playing Our Song' is a dinner theater delight

Performances of "They're Playing Our Song," presented by Theatre Arts Productions, continue through Saturday, Feb. 24, at the Days Hotel - Southfield Performing Arts Center. For ticket information call 557-4800.

Getting in touch with your feelings was a psychological mode very typical of the 1970s. Getting in control of your feelings is more the meaning of the musical "They're Playing Our Song."

Theatre Arts Productions presents this 1970s love story in a simple but provocative style at the new Days Hotel in Southfield. Unlike today's extravagant Broadway hits, "They're Playing Our Song" reduces well to dinner theater — to the comfortable cozy atmosphere of refreshments and overstuffed chairs.

What makes this production so satisfying is not the four-course meal served with the ticket. It is the convincing acting of the two leads. Paul Marquis is Vernon, a songwriter with two Grammys and an Academy Award, who broke up

with his last fiancée by leaving a message on her machine. Jane Shaffmaster is Sonia, a lyricist who wears theater costumes every day, talks with angels and turns every songwriting session into a psychoanalytic session.

Unlike most songwriters, Marquis has a pleasing ballad-type baritone voice shown off to its best advantage in the first number "Falling." The song sets the mood for the rest of the story, summed up by simply changing the pronoun "my" in the show's leading tune to "our."

HOW THESE two well-sung personalities get together, learning to live with each other's eccentricities, makes an appealing "When Harry Met Sally" story, with lover's quarrel, break-up, maturation and a happy ending.

Shaffmaster's voice has color and emotion. It would be nice if she topped the quintet throughout the show as she does in the finale. What she does with "I Still Believe in Love" is heartfelt.

Michael Klier's stage direction is

effective. Although the show is too long (two and one-half hours), Marquis and Shaffmaster are so involved with each other they manage to carry the action with the delightful help of the all-purpose Motown singers Larry Johnson, Earl Vinson and Rick Ingram. This tightly choreographed trio adds dimension every time they come on stage, either as the angels, the stagehands or the make-believe English sports car.

Nancy Tatum's black and white sets are decisively upbeat. Shaffmaster's and the trio's angel costumes are smashing. Pianist Hebeccia Klier keeps strong Motown rhythms.

Although singular in its appeal, "They're Playing Our Song" is a collaboration of Neil Simon and Marvin Hamlisch, and it is Simon's double-meaning lines which make it worth seeing several times.

Mary Jane Doerr of Troy is a fulltime teacher and freelance writer who specializes in opera and musical theater.

table talk

Anniversary wines

Restaurateur Chuck Muer gathered with wine experts Monday afternoon at Charley's Crab in Troy to sample a selection of California chardonnays and cabernet sauvignons.

Following the tasting, Chef Jeff served seafood dishes to complement the wines. The group chose one of each wine to be featured at Muer's restaurants in celebration of his 25 years in the restaurant business.

The wines will be bottled in the spring, bearing Muer's own private label, designed by artist Richard Kozlov of Birmingham. Selected were a Raymond 1988 chardonnay and a Monticello Cellars 1986 cabernet.

Olive Garden

Exotic foods and festivities of the Veneto, a romantic region in northern Italy, are being offered through Sunday, April 8, at the Olive Garden Restaurant in Livonia.

Four traditional Venetian favorites and a special dessert have been added to the menu for the event. Veal Spettacolo (a hearty classic casserole), Tortelloni Do Form (signature pasta dish of a famous restaurant in Venice), Chicken Veneto (a cheesy, saucy favorite) and Seafood Torcello (a traditional seafood dish) are the new entrées. Tiramisu is a rich, layered dessert.

Veneto region wines and a classic Venetian specialty drink are being offered by the Olive Garden. The

wines include Bottni Reserva Pinot Grigio, Sartori Valpolicella and Sartori Brut Chardonnay and an aperitif, the Bellini, made famous at Harry's Bar.

The festival also features costumed "gondolier" hosts and hostesses, colorful banners and decorations.

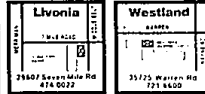
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