

Delightful cast saves 'God's Favorite'



VICTORIA DIAZ

THEATER REVIEW

The Plymouth Theater Guild's current production of "God's Favorite," directed by Nancy Harrower, succeeds despite some heavy odds against it.

Neil Simon has said that he regards this comedy-drama as his most personal play. Created shortly after the death of his first wife, this story of a modern-day Job served, he says, as a kind of therapy when he underwent a personal crisis of faith at that time.

One is glad for Simon that he had access to such a lucrative form of therapy, of course. Maybe it worked well for him. Whether his therapy works successfully as a play is another matter entirely, of course. Perhaps it is no accident that "God's Favorite" is one of Simon's lesser-known plays.

"GOD'S FAVORITE"

Theater: Plymouth Theater Guild, Water Tower Theater, 41001 West Seven Mile Road, Northville.

Curtain time: 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays through Oct. 2

Tickets: Adults \$8, seniors, youth, \$7. Purchase tickets in advance and get \$1 off. Advance tickets available at Sir Speedy Printing, 488 S. Main, Plymouth and Heavenly Bakery, 43053 W. 7 Mile, Northville. Call 349-7110.

REVIEW

A major problem lies with its large number of stale and tiresome characters.

Here, played by Gail Mesner, is the Gracie-Allen-warm-over, comically naive wife, Rose. You know, the one who almost never gets the point her deeper-thinking spouse is trying to make. Jeremy Wright plays Ben Benjamin, the big, on-the-make-with-burns-around like the proverbial bull in a china shop, Nicole Beaudoin is his hyper adolescent sister. She comes complete with plush toys

in tow, and enough silliness to last a lifetime. Jon Nettie is the older brother, David, the wise-cracking drunk.

The obligatory servants, played by Shannon Klouse and Ford Sutherland, dispense tidbits of down-to-earth wisdom, from the "funny" accents that it's Southern, I believe), and shake their weary heads at the antics of their well-to-do employers.

Each player does as well as could be expected with these old stereotypes. But really, how far can they be expected to go? Some of them are doubly handicapped in that their characters are often simply unlikable. Fortunately, lead character Joe

Benjamin, played by Jerry Salas, and God's messenger from Jackson Heights, Sidney Lipton (Salathiel Baldwin), provide delightful relief.

Though the beleaguered Joe does tend to speechify occasionally, Simon has drawn him more fully than the cardboard family over which he presides. He appears to have brain cells that function, for instance, and, in his misery, is ultimately a likable, sympathetic guy. Salas, with a kind of wiry, simmering energy, makes his character a pleasure to watch.

And speaking of pleasure, you'll get lots of it via Salathiel Baldwin as God's definitely offbeat messenger, Sydney Lipton. Dressed in what has to be the costume of the year (bring your sunglasses!) Baldwin's Sydney moves around the stage like a neon spritz. Dispensing movie trivia and other delightful bits of information, she will win you over from the time she's first discovered hiding behind that sofa in the Benjamin's



Comedy-drama: Jerry Salas as Joe Benjamin (left to right), Nicole Beaudoin of Livonia as Sarah Benjamin, Jeremy Wright of Westland as Ben Benjamin, and Gail Mesner of Plymouth as Rose Benjamin in a scene from the Plymouth Theatre Guild production of "God's Favorite."

fancy-schmancy Long Island mansion.

Costumes by Jan Paver and Mary Lynn Kuna, are a definite plus. Sets, designed by John Jordan and Nancy Harrower, and constructed by Jordan's crew,

WHAT'S COOKING

Send items to be considered for publication in What's Cooking to: Keely Wygonik, Taste/Entertainment editor, The Observer & Excelsior Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150. Our Fax number is 591-7279.

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lego's Gate Room Restaurant is operated by the Hospitality Studies program. The Gate Room is in the college's Student Center near the main entrance at 5101 Evergreen, Dearborn. Lunch served 11 a.m. and 12:15 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday. Dinner served 6 p.m. and 7:15 p.m. Wednesdays. Call 945-9642 for reservations.

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