

THEATER

Actors game but 'Blithe Spirit' creaks with age

Ridgedale Players present "Blithe Spirit," 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 16, 8 p.m. Friday, Jan. 17-Saturday, Jan. 18, and 3 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 19, at the playhouse, 205 W. Long Lake Road (between Crooks and Livernois roads). Troy. Tickets, \$8 Thursdays; \$10 other shows; \$9 for seniors for Sunday shows. Call (810) 988-7049.

BY HELEN ZUCKER
SPECIAL WRITER

The Ridgedale Players production of Noel Coward's "Blithe Spirit" is stilted. The cast of

REVIEW

seven gives it their all, but this play should be shelved for at least 50 years and then given a trial run to see if it works. In 1997, it's a creaky vehicle. As a play that deals in jealousy and the war between the sexes, it seems outmoded.

Director Anne Gowans and Assistant Director Bob Grimm keep up a slow pace where fast-flying objects and nimble wits are called for. The actors speak

in off-English accents that slide away as the acts go on. People say, "I'm going mad," instead of "I'm going mad," and "why mad?" instead of "why me?" for no discernible reason.

On the plus side, Jim West and crew have constructed a dandy set. The living room of a home in Kent; fireplace, French doors and all looks faintly spooky and authentic. Costumes by Suzanne Barcawicz, Linda Schmitz and Doris Hartman are lovely, down to nylons with seams down the back. I spent a lot of the production looking at Linda Pollicioni's

lovely velour and chiffon outfits and thinking that clothing styles return as often as wives do in "Blithe Spirit."

Larry and Linda Pollicioni have played together often, usually with great ease. As Charles and Ruth Condomine they speak to each other in a daze as if they were not quite sure how they got into this production.

Scott A. Joseph and Dianne Newland as Dr. and Mrs. Bradman seem to have the same problem. They don't seem inside the script. Dr. Bradman pops in to set an arm or drink one of the

martinis that are always on hand.

Kathy Trudeau as Edith, the dim-witted maid who turns out to be the innocent medium responsible for all sorts of havoc, looks entirely confused. She goes about like a bunny on her way to the door and screams wonderfully.

Julie Fuller as Elvira, the mischievous wife who returns, is the liveliest of the lot. This dead wife looks great dusted in a grey-green nimbus. Fuller holds up a record of "Always" with a real glint of malice.

Much of the play rests on Kathryn L. Jensen's shoulders. As Madame Arcati, the ectoplasm of loving, table rapping swami who talks to children in the other world, Jensen flings her arms out and tries to be hearty in an accent I could not trace. Jensen wears lots of jewelry, a long, green gown over a Germanic tunic, and sends all the wives packing in the end. She's at her best, saying honestly "I don't know."

Oh well, I do know there are better productions ahead.

Excellent acting, set in Village's 'The Sisters Rosensweig'

Village Players present "The Sisters Rosensweig," 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, Jan. 17-18, 24-25; and 2 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 19, 752 Chester (corner of Hunter Blvd., south of Maple), Birmingham. Tickets \$12 adults, \$10 students, call (810) 644-2075. BY SANDRA DALKE-PRYBY

SPECIAL WRITER

If entertainment and good acting is what you want to chase away the winter chill, The Village Players' production of "The Sisters Rosensweig" fits the bill. All of the female cast members — there are four — do an exceptional job in their roles. And there's a couple of male standouts too.

This "almost-a-comedy-yes-

REVIEW

drama" play centers around three sisters and one niece. Like a line in the play these four women are "people always watching and never belonging," as the play progresses, this changes.

The oldest Rosensweig sister is Sara Goode, a successful banker in London. Maureen Cook does an exceptional job bringing out this sister's conservative and unadventurous nature. She looks the part in traditional garb and she acts the role with distinct diction and reserved actions. She relishes "safety" for herself and

her daughter Tess (played by Kathy Ableson), who rebels against her mother's orderly lifestyle.

Interaction between the mother and daughter is believable, a testament to the fine acting of these two women. The believability continues with the arrival of sister number two, the world-trotting, travel writing Pfeni Rosensweig. Doing a superb job in this role is Sally Savio. Her expressions and movements, warmth and smiles draw the audience to her immediately.

Then there's sister number three, the middle sister, Georgious Teitelbaum, a radio "doctor/problem solver" from the Boston suburbs. This third sister,

played in terrifically outlandish style by Linda Hammel, adds zeal to the play and to Sarah's 54th birthday celebration, the reason for the sisters' reunion.

Another Hammel — Mark, who is also Linda's husband — adds to the production in the role of New York furrier Mervyn Kant. His boldness (to disguise his true nervousness) and repartee with Sara sets the stage for possibility if Sara dare take a chance. His persistence is charming as are his unsophisticated clothes.

Eric Kent Franz, as Geoffrey Duncan, Pfeni's love, is the other male who also takes center stage in this production. The audience has no problem believing that he

is a London theatrical director (he's theatrical), nor that he is bisexual (thus setting up a conflict with his "lady love.") A few hours after declaring his love for Pfeni and suggesting that they marry, Geoffrey says he "misses men." A resigned Pfeni says she does, too!

This interaction, like all the others in this production, takes place in Sara's warm and elegant sitting room in Queen Anne's Gate. It is such a detailed set, with the appropriate trappings and rich accessories of a comfortable lifestyle, that it's hard to believe it's not permanent and not in a real house.

Excellent acting, including efforts by Ron Hall and Larry

Sweet, and a great set are joined by good direction and a script that gives viewers both thought-provoking moments and comic relief. All these ingredients combine for a successful and entertaining production. The "Sisters" have it all!

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- Four- and 5-year-olds can experience the wonderful world of art through introductory classes encouraging self-expression in various media. Older youngsters, ages 6-14, have their choice of classes in cartooning, clay, drawing, mixed media, painting and photography.

- Offerings for adults include bookbinding, cartooning, clay, drawing, matting, painting (oil/acrylic), paperman, 14, photography, printmaking, tapestry and watercolor. High school students are welcome in the adult program.

- Paint Creek classes and workshops are taught by professional artists who share their enthusiasm for the creative process with students of all skill levels.

- Enroll early — classes fill quickly. Registration may be

made in person at the art center or by phone. The PCCA is at 407 Pine, two blocks west of Main in downtown Rochester. For a brochure of winter classes, call (810) 651-4110 between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday.

- The Community House, 380 S. Bates in Birmingham, presents fine arts and writing courses. Call (810) 844-5832.

- "Calligraphy — Uncial Letters" will take place 1-3:30 p.m. for six Tuesdays beginning Jan. 28 (omit Feb. 18). Cost is \$48. Discover the beauty of this open and rounded historical hand as you study the basic letterforms of the Uncial alphabet and their more contemporary applications.

- "Creative Writing" will run 7-9 p.m. for 10 Tuesdays beginning Jan. 14. Cost is \$60. The initial emphasis will be on fiction, but students will have the opportunity to write poetry later in the term. Beginning as well as experienced students are welcome. Bring pen and paper and some of your own work, if possible, to class. Instructor Jack Zuckor is a published poet and fiction writer and co-editor of The Bridge, a literary journal.

- "Creating Children's Faces in Clay" will be taught by sculptor Janice Trimpe 1-4 p.m. for eight Mondays beginning Jan. 13. Cost is \$110. Learn to sculpt a likeness of a child's head and shoulders from photographs.

- The Creative Arts Center, 47 Williams in Pontiac, offers skill-based classes for children, adults and teens. The new term begins Jan. 14 and ends March 8.

Registration deadline is Friday, Jan. 10. Center members receive a 10-percent discount on tuition. Call (810) 333-7849.

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