

Farce at Oakland

Oscar Garcia

1968

What a good year this has been for farce. We're talking about theatre here, not politics.

The Hilberry Classic company at Wayne State has been very successful in its productions of Feydeau's "A Flea in Her Ear" and Labiche/Marc-Michel's "An Italian Straw Hat." Moliere's "Tartuffe" made Shakespearean plays take a back seat at the Stratford, Ontario Festival last summer; it was worth a special trip and it is returning next year.

In Ann Arbor the APA Company opened their short season with "Le Misanthrope," another Moliere farce. And now through December 29 the John Fernald company at Meadowbrook Theatre is delighting audiences with Sir Arthur Wing Pinero's family farce, "The Magistrate."

It's a fortunate coincidence that in this gloomy, tragic election year such productions can lift the clouds for an evening and enable one to laugh unabashedly, without the sophistication of a Neil Simon situation comedy.

Anyway, it has been a fun year and seeing "The Magistrate" at Oakland University is one good way to enjoy the coming holidays.

The plot is very simple and classic. An unknown, rather, a concealed factor and an ordinary coincidence turn a peaceful, if ill-founded household into chaos.

Simple, but the fun is in seeing how the company develops close calls and copes with them.

It's fun watching Posket the magistrate of the Mulberry court, after having broken the law himself, adamantly refuse to be lenient with two ladies who broke the same law, only to find out they are his wife and sister-in-law.

While the entire cast is very entertaining, Eric Berry, as Posket, and Richard Curnock, as Colonel Lukyn, are outstanding as the main forces of the farce. The funniest scene is between these two as they argue before the moment of truth in court; Posket standing on virtue and legality, the colonel on discretion.

Mary Savidge provides the classic picture of a lady as Agatha Posket—shrewd, cunning and quite proper about everything. Even when pinching a man under a table in a darkened room Mrs. Posket makes certain it's her husband.

Characterization is rich in this production. Some characters are subtly appealing, others are comically gross exaggerations like Achille Blond (ha, ha, look he's gay) played by J. Michael Bloom. Bloom's Achille looks like a cross between Doris Day and a St. Bernard with the manners of Liberace.

At first Jeremy Rowe looks ridiculous as Cis, resembling Clint Eastwood in a schoolboy uniform. Then Mrs. Posket lets us, not Cis, in on her secret. As events roll on, Rowe develops an impudent and clever enfant terrible.

Virginia North, as Charlotte, and Victor Holchak, as Captain Horace Vale, gives strong support and hilarious distractions. And Elisabeth Orion, as Mrs. Wyke, and Max Howard, as Bullamy, highlight the production with their vignettes.

One of the nicest things about this show is seeing Douglas Seale, who, on top of directing the whole good time, provides us with a charming Mr. Worthington, a little world in himself.

The costumes and sets are lovely; never distracting, yet worth preserving.

You can bring the whole family to this one, any bawdiness will escape the innocent and dense minds.

fifth Estate

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Fifth Estate #68, December 12-25, 1968

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