

Richmond Hill swaps genders for 'Odd Couple'

Quad City Times – May 7, 2003 - by Ruby Nancy

Neil Simon's "The Odd Couple" — currently playing at the Richmond Hill Barn Theatre in Geneseo, Ill. — is a familiar script, and the classic story of roommates with opposite personalities has entertained millions in versions found onstage, on film and even on television.

"The Odd Couple (The Female Version)" is yet another incarnation of the same story (with Olive Madison and Florence Unger), and even that script has been updated (the telegram is now an e-mail, for instance). First-time director Jeannie Duyck has put together a play that is plenty of fun.

Some of the ensemble scenes needed better pacing opening weekend, as did an argument or two between the leads, but this show is still very entertaining. A group of women play a diverse handful of roles — friends of Olive and Florence who show up for game night — and their bickering and conversations have plenty of funny lines. The faces some of these actors make earn their biggest laughs, however, and I especially enjoyed Jackie Skiles' work as a languorous cop and April DeBeir's blinking airhead.

Valerie Berryman makes her Richmond Hill Players debut as Olive, and though she struggles some to look like a true slob, her sometimes laid-back, always fun-loving portrayal of this character is enjoyable to watch. Susan Simosky brings plenty of verve to her laugh-out-loud work in the role of Florence, and she inhabits the continuous drama of Flo's many long suffering moments with good-natured energy. Provoking huge laughs with — at times — nothing but a sigh, she works the role for all the humor it is worth.

Her conversation with the brothers from Barcelona (who replace the bird sisters in Simon's original) is a comic triumph that will have you in stitches, and Simosky even gets a lot of mileage out of simply throwing herself on a sofa or glancing around the room. Her performance is an unqualified success.

Scott Hoelscher and Greg Kerr are the Barcelona brothers, and their mangling of English and Spanish is a lot of fun. These are not characters who excel at party conversation, and Hoelscher and Kerr both earn huge laughs as the brothers try to do just that.

A basic set (dressed appropriately for each scene) and updated costumes are in keeping with the adapted script, which has enough jokes to keep the setups and one-liners at the heart of this very enjoyable comedy. And though it's not "adult material" in the usual sense of the phrase, grownups are the ones who will think this show is funny.

You'll enjoy "The Odd Couple (The Female Version)," so go prepared to laugh.

'Odd Couple' highlighted by wonderful cast

Argus/Dispatch – May 7, 2003 - by Julie Jensen

Neil Simon's female version of "The Odd Couple" now playing at the Richmond Hill Barn is good for a lot of laughs, and it also introduces a marvelously expressive actress, Valerie Berryman, who plays Olive Madison, the slob.

Ms. Berryman moves beautifully, and her gestures and facial shifts are a delight.

Susan Simosky, who plays Florence Unger, the neatnik, is good at broad comedy, employing gasps, sighs, shrieks and silent seething to achieve it.

The friends who come to Olive's apartment for a weekly game of Trivial Pursuit are nicely assorted.

Mickey, played by Jackie Skiles, is a policewoman. Vera, played by April DeBeir, is a little slow on the uptake but sweet. Renee, a real dish who is dating a gynecologist is portrayed by Sherra Lasley, and Sylvie, played by Jessica Hubbard, is quick-witted and funny.

The Spanish brothers, Manolo, played by Scott Hoelscher, and Jesus, played by Greg Kerr, enliven the action in the second act. Their accent is good, and their unfamiliarity with the English language creates some howlers.

So what's going on here? Florence's husband, Sidney, has thrown her out, and Olive takes her in. They couldn't be more different, and obviously, this is not going to work out.

The littered set of the first act gives way to perfect order in the second. However, the psychic atmosphere is anything but orderly.

Director Jeannie Duyck has paced the action very well, and when the Trivial Pursuit players sign off by singing "Big Girls Don't Cry-y-y," you know you've been entertained.