

## THEATER

## STAGE NOTES

## 3 openings keep summer hopping

By Michael Grossberg  
Dispatch Theater Critic

Despite the dog days of August, central Ohio's theater scene remains lively, with three openings tonight.

Reality Theatre and Act Out Productions will offer two recent gay-oriented hits, while Otterbein Summer Theatre will end its season.

■ Reality Theatre launches its 14th season with *The Last Hairdresser*. Doug Holsclaw's comedy about the coming-of-age experiences of three men at a beauty school.

"You don't see many honest-to-goodness farces anymore," director Michael Mauldin said.

"This is a very funny gay farce about stereotyping — both within and outside the gay community." The two-act play, fresh from San Francisco's Theatre Rhinoceros, won the San Francisco Bay Area Critics' Award for best play of 1997.

"Holsclaw writes very cleverly, but he also has some very subversive things to say about the gay community, which you'd think would be open and accepting, but in fact can be very close-minded."

Mauldin played the title role in Ohio State University's acclaimed update of *The Imaginary Invalid* and presented his nationally touring one-man show, *An Evening With Mark Twain*, last summer at Act Out Productions. He is moving to



Matt Welsh, left, and Jon Arndt in Act Out Productions' *Beautiful Thing*

Missouri next week to become a professor of theater at Southwest Missouri State University. He moved here in 1993 from New York to study at OSU, where he is finishing his doctoral thesis on the 19th-century actor Edwin Booth, brother of John Wilkes Booth, who assassinated Abraham Lincoln.

Mauldin said he isn't worried about Reality Theatre and Act Out Productions dividing the limited audience for gay fare with simultaneous openings. "Isn't it grand? It speaks well for Columbus. People can go to one play on one night and the other on the other night."

*The Last Hairdresser* will be performed at 7:30 tonight, 8 p.m.

Friday and Saturday, and 7 p.m. Sunday — and 8 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays and 7 p.m. Sundays through Aug. 29 at 736 N. Pearl St. For tickets, call 614-294-7541.

■ Act Out Productions will launch its season with *Beautiful Thing*, British playwright Jonathan Harvey's urban fairy tale about two teen-age boys who fall in love.

"Most American audiences know it as a film, but it was a huge hit in London's West End," director Frank Barnhart said.

"Americans are just beginning to discover *Beautiful Thing* onstage, with the rights recently released. The film follows the play very closely, except that some of the secondary characters in the film are just talked about onstage.

"Americans aren't used to seeing plays about teen-agers exploring their sexuality. It's called *Beautiful Thing* for a reason; it's a beautiful story about how these boys, their friends and family deal with accepting who they are."

Jon Arndt and Matt Welsh, both in their early 20s, will play the teen-agers Jamie and Steve, with Elaine Miracle as Jamie's mother. Supporting cast members include Jim Speegle and Tracie Pary.

Performances are at 7:30 tonight, 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday — and through Aug. 22 — at the Davis Discovery Center's Van Fleet Theatre, 549 Franklin Ave. For tickets, call 614-263-9448.

■ Meanwhile, Otterbein Summer Theatre will end its season with *Laughter on the 23rd Floor*, Neil Simon's 1950s-era comedy about television gag writers. Guest Equity actor Phil Kilbourne stars as the troubled TV star.

Performances begin at 7:30 tonight, 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and 2 p.m. Sunday — and Aug. 12-16 — at the Campus Center Theatre, 100 W. Home St., Westerville. For tickets, call 614-823-1109.

## EARLY SHOW

Contemporary American Theatre Company will present an "early-bird" performance of *Ten Minute Alibi* at 7 p.m. Tuesday. One such performance will be scheduled for each production of CATCO's 1998-99 season. *Alibi*, Anthony Armstrong's rarely revived 1930s British mystery, continues through Aug. 22 in the Riffe Center's Studio One Theatre, 77 S. High St. For tickets, call 614-461-0010.

## HILLIARD COUP

The Hilliard Davidson High School Drama Department, led by Robin Brenneman and Diana Vance, has been chosen to perform this month at the American High School Theatre Festival, part of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in Scotland.

Eight actors and 10 crew members will present *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown* four times. Fifteen American high schools will perform at the festival, with the

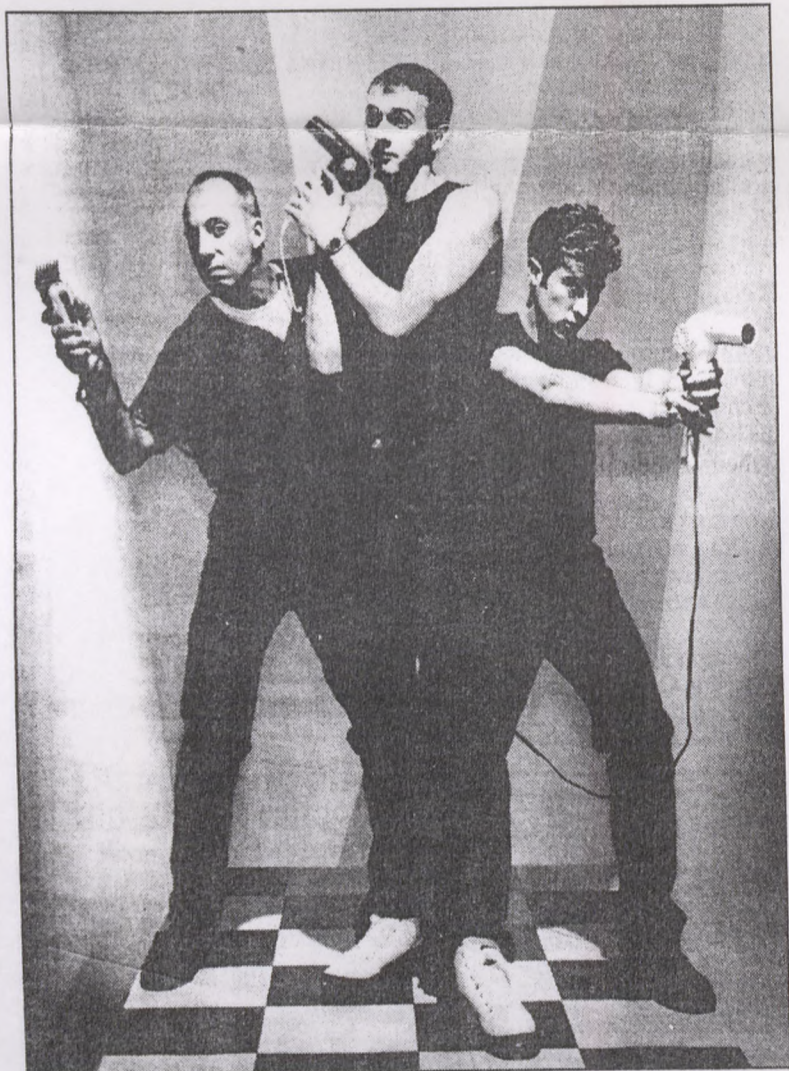


Jeff Hinckley Dispatch

From left, Ben Hauck, Phil Kilbourne and Marc Donmayer in Otterbein Summer Theatre's *Laughter on the 23rd Floor*

Hilliard group representing Ohio. Next year, Fort Hayes High School will perform there.

To raise money for the trip, the group will perform the musical at 7:30 p.m. Saturday at Hilliard Davidson High School's Performing Arts Center, 5100 Davidson Rd., Hilliard. Tickets cost \$5. For more information, call 614-771-8025.



Stephen Webster/Worldwide Hideout photo

From left, Alex Libby, R. Scott Whitaker and Mark Snyder in Reality Theatre's *The Last Hairdresser*



# Autobiographical Simon play staged at Otterbein

Otterbein Summer Theatre will welcome Equity guest actor Phil Kilbourne for the season's final production, Neil Simon's "Laughter on the 23rd Floor," which opens Thursday.

Simon's semi-autobiographical comedy harkens back to the golden age of television and his days as a writer for Sid Caesar's "Show of Shows." Simon's fellow writers on that show, who are portrayed in the play, were a collection of some of entertainment's most eccentric individuals. They gathered daily in a small room to bat ideas for skits back and forth, to argue, schmooze and kibitz the day away, but still managing to get enough down on paper to justify their paychecks.

The group includes Milt, an aggressive insult artist; Ira, a serious hypochondriac; Val, a Russian emigre who can't master the pronunciation of the obscenities he wants to hurl at the other writers; and Carol, the sole woman on the writing staff, who survives by acting like a man, cursing like a man, and suffering through pregnancy like a man.

At the center of the action is Max Prince, played by Kilbourne, the star of the show. Max is a big-hearted maniac who ingest liquor and pills in large quantities and who cares most about making people laugh.

The play follows the beginning of the end of the show, as NBC threatens to cut the show's running time, budget and even one of the writers.

Kilbourne was most recently seen at Otterbein as Polonius in "Hamlet" and last year directed "The Miser." Kilbourne graduated from Boston University and received his master's degree in fine arts in direction from Ohio State University.

At Ohio State, he directed "Eleemosynary," "Speed-the-Plow," and Moliere's "The Imaginary Invalid," which was named Best Production of the Year by the *Columbus Dispatch*,

and which won one of the first Central Ohio Critics Circle awards.

Recently in Columbus, Kilbourne directed "Romeo and Juliet" at Actor's Theatre and "Jack and Jill" for Red Herring. As an Ohio actor, Kilbourne has played Titus Andronicus for Actor's Theatre, Charles in "Blithe Spirit" for CATCO, and Lloyd in "Reckless" at Ohio State. He has performed more than 60 roles with Summer Theatre at Mt. Holyoke College and the New Century Theatre in western Massachusetts.

In his 20 years as an actor, Kilbourne has more than 150 professional credits to his name.

He now lives in St. Paul, Minn., where he works for Theatre-at-Work.

Scenic designer for the production is D. Glen Vanderbilt Jr., a professor of theatre at Ohio Wesleyan University. He has worked around the country as a designer, director and educator at Interlochen Center for the Arts, CATCO, the University of Colorado Shakespeare Festival, Vanderbilt University, Northwestern University and Hong Kong Repertory Theatre. This is his sixth production for Otterbein.

Otterbein Summer Theatre will present "Laughter on the 23rd Floor" in the Campus Center Theatre, 100 W. Home St., Aug. 6-10 and Aug. 12-16.

The opening night performance begins at 7:30 p.m. and all other evening performances are at 8 p.m. Sunday matinees are at 2 p.m. There will also be a 7:30 p.m. performance on Sunday, Aug. 16.

Tickets are \$14 for Sunday and Wednesday performances, \$15 for Thursday and Friday nights, and \$16 for Saturday and opening night. Ticket orders can be placed by calling the OST box office at 823-1109 between 12:30 and 8:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday and one hour prior to performances on Sunday. The box office will be closed Aug. 10.

CLENTANGY VALLEY NEWS  
COLUMBUS, OH.  
W. CIRC. 6,956

AUG-5-98

## 'Laughter' concludes season

By JULANNE HOHBACH <sup>389</sup>

Suburban News Reporter

The semi-autobiographical Neil Simon comedy *Laughter on the 23rd Floor* closes out the Otterbein College summer theater season begins this week.

The play takes the audience back to the golden age of television, when Simon was a writer on Sid Caesar's *Your Show of Shows*, along with Mel Brooks and others. Simon chronicles the travails of the writers' room, complete with an oddball group of writers.

*Laughter on the 23rd Floor* runs Thursday-Monday and Aug. 12-16 in the Campus Center Theatre, 100 W. Home St.

Equity guest actor Phil Kilbourne returns to Otterbein to star as Max Prince, the star of the fictional show that is the centerpiece of *Laughter*. Kilbourne played Polonius in Otterbein's production of *Hamlet* and directed *The Miser* last year. Eight other actors round out the cast.

The play details the end of the show as NBC threatens to cut the show length, budget and even a writer.

Director Dennis Romer said the play appealed to him partly because of the characters, all of whom are in their late 20s and early 30s, which is perfect for a college production. But the appeal also involved the era of television involved, in this case 1953.

"I was always fascinated with that period in television history," Romer said.

The hijinx of the writers and pressure of live television are all part of the fun.

"Mostly, the challenge lies in 'Can we believably recreate the feeling of people being in a writing room,'" Romer said.

"They have to act goofy to do the serious business of comedy writing."

Acting goofy happens here through dart boards and other diversions, as well as one character who dresses wildly in an attempt to get laughs out of the show's star.

Romer said despite the true-to-life subject matter, *Laughter on the 23rd Floor* is a typical Simon comedy that will not disappoint audiences.

D. Glen Vanderbilt Jr., theater professor at Ohio Wesleyan University, is the scenic designer. Marcia Hain is the costume designer.

Performances begin at 7:30 p.m. Thursday and Aug. 16, 8 p.m. Friday, Sunday and Aug. 12-15 and 2 p.m. Monday and Aug. 16.

Tickets are \$14 for Sunday and Wednesday shows, \$15 for Thursday and Friday shows and \$16 for Saturday and opening night.

The box office is open 12-8:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday and one hour prior to performances Sunday. The box office will be closed Monday. Patrons may call the box office at 823-1109.



# Neil Simon comedy closes Otterbein's Summer season

Otterbein Summer Theatre will welcome Equity Guest Actor Phil Kilbourne for the season's final production--Neil Simon's *Laughter on the 23rd Floor*.

Simon's semi-autobiographical comedy, *Laughter on the 23rd Floor*, harkens back to the golden age of television and his days as a writer for *Sid Caesar's Show of Shows*.

Simon's fellow writers on that show, who are portrayed in this hilarious play, were a collection of some of entertainment's most eccentric individuals. They gathered daily in a small room to bat ideas for skits back and forth, to argue, schmooze and kibitz the day away, but still managing to get enough down on paper to

justify their paychecks. The play recalls the insanity, the mind-boggling cascade of jokes and the fury, real and simulated, that kept the writers' room in a constant state of turmoil.

The group includes Milt, an aggressive insult artist; Ira, a serious hypochondriac; Val, a Russian emigre who can't master the pronunciation of the obscenities he wants to hurl at the other writers and Carol, the sole woman on the writing staff, although to survive she has to act like a man, curse like a man and suffer through pregnancy like a man.

At the center of all this is Max Prince, played by Kilbourne, the star of the show. Max is a big-

hearted maniac who ingests liquor and pills in equally large quantities and who cares most about making people laugh.

The play follows the beginning of the end of the show as NBC threatens to cut the show's running time, budget and even one of the writers threatening the manic camaraderie of the writing group.

Joel Sigel of ABC-TV said of *Laughter on the 23rd Floor*, "Flat out hysteria! A must see! Neil Simon has never been funnier."

Kilbourne was most recently seen at Otterbein as Polonius in *Hamlet* and last year he directed *The Miser*. Kilbourne graduated from Boston University with a B.F.A. in Theatre and received his

M.F.A. in Direction from The Ohio State University.

This is his sixth production for Otterbein. His *A Perfect Ganesh* design for CATCO recently won an award for merit from the USITT-Ohio Valley, which Vanderbilt has won on five previous occasions. His design for *Angel Street* (Interlochen Arts Camp) was selected for the Design Expo '96 at the National USITT Conference.

Otterbein Summer Theatre will present *Laughter on the 23rd Floor* in the Campus center Theatre, 100 W. Home St. in Westerville, Aug. 6-10 and Aug. 12-16.

The opening night performance begins at 7:30 p.m. and all

other evening performance are at 8 p.m. Sunday matinees are at 3 p.m. On Sunday, Aug. 16, there will also be a 7:30 p.m. performance.

Tickets are \$14 for Sunday and Wednesday performances, \$15 for Thursday and Friday nights and \$16 for Saturday and opening night. Order tickets by calling the Otterbein Summer Theatre box office at 823-1109 between 12:30 and 8:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday and one hour prior to performances on Sunday. The box office will be closed July 20, 27 and Aug. 10.

**Laughter on the 23rd Floor** — You'll laugh till it hurts at Neil Simon's recent Broadway hit, an autobiographical recollection of his early career as a television writer for Sid Caesar's 1950s variety show. Director Dennis Romer's cast is generally good, although it has difficulty sustaining the banter of the star's stable of writers in the early scenes. Phil Kilbourne is inspired as Max Prince, a star who alternates between hostility, magnanimity and incoherence. Also noteworthy: Robin Borovic, as Prince's ditsy secretary and Jesse Wilson's Russian-refugee writer, underplayed to perfection. **Otterbein Summer Theatre.** (Reviewed by Scott Phillips.)

Columbus Dispatch Thursday Aug 13,  
1988