



Plays at Otterbein, OSU have same theme

# Gibson, Simon comedy-dramas give

Nancy Gilson

It's a summer of troubled romance. Two comedy-dramas about intense, funny and stormy relationships are offered by Ohio State University and Otterbein College.

OSU's repertory Theatre Company '81 is staging William Gibson's two-actor "Two for the Seesaw." Otterbein Summer Theater performs Neil Simon's autobiographical "Chapter Two."

Each is a lively look at lovers who travel from the spring blush of infatuation through a season of discontent to a bittersweet resolution. Both plays occur in New York City. And each set of lovers, like modern couples, conducts a good deal of their romance by telephone.

"Chapter Two" analyzes George, a writer devastated by the death of his first wife, and Jennie, a divorced actress. Their union is based on Simon's with actress Marsha Mason.

George suffers blind dates (including a creature named "Bambi") arranged by his brother until, amazingly, Leo comes up with a winner — sweet, pretty, droll Jennie Malone.

George and Jennie fall quickly in love, much to the skepticism of Leo and Jennie's friend, Faye, who pursue a guilty affair on the side.

The light first act concerns the blissful, heady courtship. In the second act, George collides with dormant grief and the guilt he feels at his impulsive entrance into another relationship.

The Otterbein actors are too young

for these four roles but they are nicely cast. Evan Uchtman, more handsome than the role requires, is a blunt, serious George. He's mature and consistent and is a nice match for Kelley Maurer who plays Jennie. She has disarming resignation as well as explosive passion.

The heavy scenes aren't always convincing, probably because of the actors' ages. But performances are fluid and Uchtman and Miss Maurer usually are realistic and always likeable.

Richard Buckley as Leo and Jeanine Howe as Faye supply broad comedy. Buckley is a mite too gregarious but his expansive performance is neatly countered by Miss Howe's superb deadpanning.

She's excellent as a frustrated wife who covets just one fireworks romance but is scared silly she'll be found out. Faye borrows Jennie's apartment for a rendezvous with Leo then skulks around in the dark in a pink negligee and sunglasses, nervously puffing a cigarette.

The play's action shifts across stage between the apartments of George and Jennie. Director Fred J. Thayer's timing is excellent. The pace isn't exactly lickety-split but scenes are active and often followed by thoughtful pauses before blackout.

It's an unpretentious performance and it works. "Chapter Two" is the best to date of OST's season.

OSU explores love with an older play, "Two for the Seesaw" which takes place in 1959.

Gittel is a kooky Jewish girl who falls for a Midwestern lawyer, even though she suspects the ending won't be happy. She talks tough, but her hard shell is easily cracked to expose a vulnerable woman.

Jerry is on the run from a wife who wants to marry someone else and a father-in-law who molded his career. He's bright, smooth, troubled and clearly still attached to his wife in Omaha. His phone conversations with her are painful: "You can't sink a knife in me and then hope for an afterglow."

As in "Chapter Two," the set represents two apartments. Gittel's, on one side, is compact and cheery. A bright quilt covers the bed, dance posters liv-

en the walls, Aaron Copland music comes from the radio.

Jerry's flat is spartan. He has a ragged green hide-a-bed, a clothesline stretched between walls and no curtains or other homey touches.

Between scenes, the stage goes dark and attention is diverted to the dimly lit rooftop with its melancholy view of the New York skyline.

Gibson's play is potent. The problems his characters face are relevant today. Discussions are complicated. The lovers don't necessarily speak the truth all the time but they mean to. They're good people but unavoidably human.

## lively look at love

Both Patricia Cosgrove (Gittel) and Geoffrey Nelson (Jerry) are too stern in their roles. This production is more drama than comedy and the imbalance is troublesome.

Miss Cosgrove is good at being vulnerable, which is central to her role. Her New York accent, however, is excessive as is her treatment of Gittel's ulcer. Anyone with mild indigestion is likely to squirm in his seat.

Nelson is lanky and boyish. He competently explores the charming, selfish and mysterious traits of his character.

Under Ionia Zelenka's direction, the play proceeds swiftly — good at first but methodical and numbing toward the end.

That and the fact the actors are not willing to emote fully robs the play of pathos. Nelson and Miss Cosgrove back away from the final scene. The conclusion seems rushed, pat and unsatisfying.

Until then, "Two for the Seesaw" offers as convincing a look at trouble-fraught love as Otterbein's "Chapter Two" does throughout.

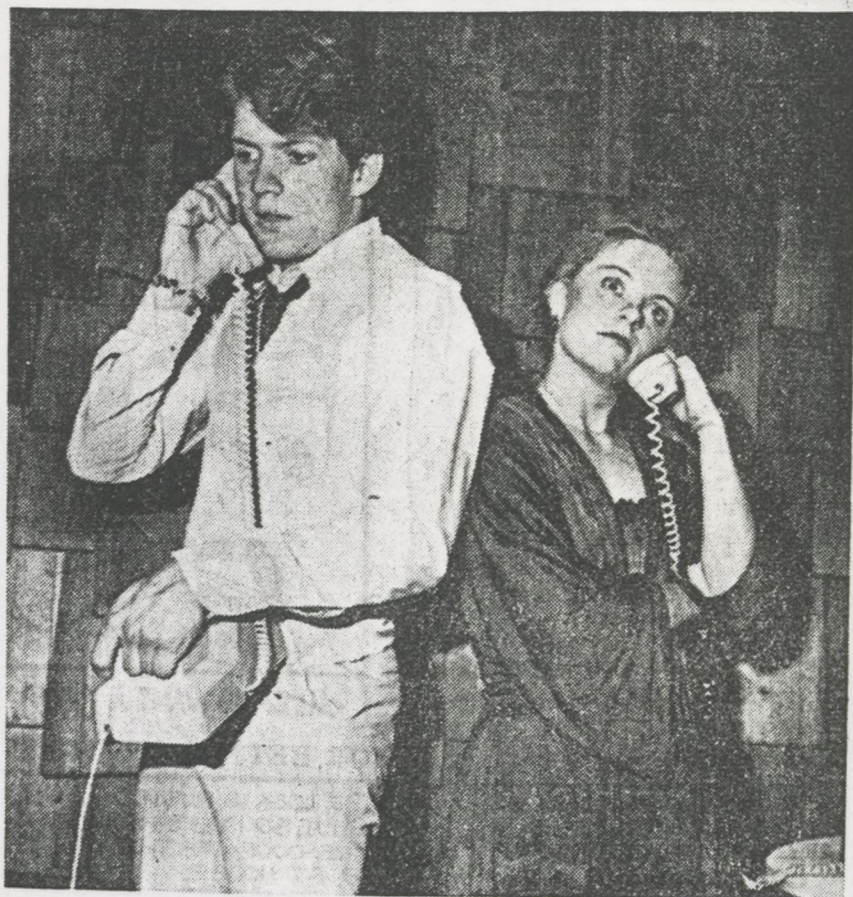
Who was it that said "the course of true love never did run smooth?"

"Chapter Two" continues through Saturday at the Campus Center Arena Theatre at Otterbein College.

"Two For the Seesaw" continues through Aug. 29 at Drake Union's Thurber Theatre at Ohio State University.



# Entertainment



Dispatch Photo

## Who's Calling?

Evan Uchtman and Kelly Maurer, portraying George Schneider and Jennie Malone, are brought together by a phone call in the Otterbein Summer Theatre production of Neil

Simon's *Chapter Two*. The play will be presented at 8:30 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday in the Campus Center Arena Theatre on the Otterbein campus in Westerville.