

# Performances purr, but 'Cat' toothless

By Michael Grossberg

Dispatch Theater Critic

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Doors slam. Men and women strip to their unmentionables, mistake each other's identities and pretend to be what they're not.

The classic ingredients of farce are on mildly amusing display in Georges Feydeau's *Cat Among the Pigeons*, which opened last night at Otterbein College Theatre.

Feydeau was a master of French farce. In fact, his turn-of-the-century hits (*A Flea in Her Ear*, *A Little Hotel on the Side*) defined the genre. Yet, *Cat Among the Pigeons* seems obvious and overlong.

How naughty this romantic rondelet must have seemed to early-20th-century audiences. Their rigid standards of manners and morals gave Feydeau something solid off which he could bounce his leading character's sexual peccadillos.

Today, in an era of more relaxed and tolerant sexuality, *Cat* has lost its bite and most of its claws.

Otterbein's student production purrs along under veteran Charles Dodrill's well-paced direction, but the script is not as hilarious as it should be to sustain interest through three plot-twist-packed acts.

At Tuesday's student preview, the chuckles were common enough but the belly laughs were infrequent.

The 21-member student cast tackles its stock comic roles with arched eyebrows, upturned noses and frequent exclamations of "Darling!" and "Madam!"

In the pivotal role of the "cat," Josh Gildrie prowls from woman to woman with a laid-back, devil-may-care sophistication. His Fernand Bois d'Enghien is a jaded young roue who can't quite find the right time or place — or the courage — to tell his longtime lover that he plans to marry a wealthy young girl.

Gildrie's confident, relaxed performance leads a solid ensemble.

Nicole Franklin-Kern is saucy and cheeky as the music-hall star who counts on her long entanglement with Fernand to continue.

Rachel Chaves plays Viviane, Fernand's betrothed, with a hint of

## THEATER REVIEW

*Cat Among the Pigeons*, Otterbein College Theatre's student production of Georges Feydeau's farce. Directed by Charles Dodrill.

Fernand Bois d'Enghien..... Josh Gildrie  
..... Nicole Franklin-Kern  
Lucette ..... Nicole Franklin-Kern  
Baroness Duverger..... Tirzah Wise  
Gontran De Chenneville.. Brian Fox  
Nini Galant ..... Tonya Watson

**A little humor on the side**

**Performances are** at 8 tonight through Saturday and 2 p.m. Sunday in Cowan Hall, 30 S. Grove St.

**Tickets cost** \$8-\$9.50. Call 823-1109.

pent-up passion that's just right for her ironic character. While Fernand expects Viviane to be dismayed at his previous affairs, she's actually quite relieved to discover her fiancé isn't as boringly virginal as he has led her and her mother to believe.

Brian Fox displays an easygoing charm as Fernand's commiserating buddy-in-deception.

Equally vivid are Tonya Watson's classy Nini Galant and Tirzah Wise's imperious Baroness.

Two performers have fun with buffoonish supporting roles: Yosvany Reyes, whose exaggerated macho walk as sex-crazed General Irrigua adds immeasurably to the nonsense; and Adam Donmeyer, a self-obsessed songwriter with no talent for music but an uncanny knack for walking in at the wrong moment.

The attractive production is bolstered by Gordon DeVinney's opulent period costumes — his best work in some time — and Fred Smith's plush French drawing-room and hotel-hallway sets.

Farce is a tricky form — as Red Herring Productions' current revival of *What the Butler Saw* also shows.

*Cat Among the Pigeons* reflects a creditable undergraduate effort, but Otterbein's latest stab at Feydeau falls short of previous efforts.

Blame the aging script.