

6/26/80 Columbus Dispatch

# Chuckles Boil Into Laughter In 'Bedroom Farce'

Otterbein Summer Theater was vying with *Grease* and *Burlesque U.S.A.* on opening night and didn't go begging for folks to see *Bedroom Farce*.

A remarkably prompt crowd took in the Alan Ayckbourn comedy set in the bedrooms of three British couples, each of whom are having a terrible evening at the hand of a fourth couple.

Some of the patrons may have come out of some loyalty to Dennis Romer, an Otterbein alumnus who recently completed a stint on the soap opera *As the World Turns*. He certainly did a great job directing the show which was put together in a week.

**BEDROOM FARCE** opens in the home of Ernest (John Ebner) and Delia

(Tamyan Sager). They are preparing to celebrate an anniversary.

It is here that we learn the marriage of their son Trevor (Bruce Marvin) to Susannah (Fontaine Follansbee) is in trouble.

Everybody seems to know that, including Jan (Ann Doering), one of Trevor's former girlfriends who is dressing for an evening out. She'll be going alone since husband Nick (Rich Tatgenhorst) has thrown his back out and is stuck in bed for several days.

Her destination is a house warming party given by Kate (Linda Finnell) and Malcolm (Jeffrey Garber). Trevor and Susannah will be there, too.

After this exposition comes a series of comic bedroom situations, some pre-



Rose  
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**Theater**

dictable, some with a slightly new twist.

**BEDROOM FARCE** builds from a simmer of chuckles to a boil of laughter as changes from one bedroom to another grow more rapid. The flimsiness of Ayckbourn's script is well hidden by the pace and by the cast's flair for comedy.

However, that flair as well as other acting skills is unevenly distributed. There is a noticeable difference in the abilities of Otterbein Summer Theater veterans and newcomers to develop a character quickly and thoroughly.

Ebner is best at providing Ernest with shadings that make him a middle-aged British man preoccupied with a leaky roof and inclined to be slightly stuffy. His walk, his half-smile and half-glasses blend with his diction to add another fine portrayal to Ebner's growing list of memorable parts.

Miss Sager lends a slightly snobbish air to a woman who is in control of the household but has enough hangups that she spells rather than says sex.

**ANGERED BY HIS** infirmity, Tat-

genhorst relies too much on large actions to make Nick a hilarious victim of circumstance. Sometimes he is too agile to be in as much pain as he says he is. And his anger muffles the pain.

Miss Doering makes an effectively contrasting picture of confidence to Susannah. She is the straightest of the characters and knows better than to steal laughs.

Miss Finnell and Garber appear to be playing the zaniest, most fun-loving couple of the bunch when the play opens, but their potential for comedy breaks down.

Ayckbourn's construction is part of their problem. He didn't seem to know what to do with Kate and Malcolm after he got them through the first act.

**MISS FINNELL** tries to keep alive the high-pitched frenzy of a household where you never know what you'll find in your bed, but she and Garber are unable to overcome Ayckbourn's failings.

Hardly the picture of violence painted by several characters, Marvin does embody the goofiness one would expect of Trevor.

Miss Follansbee has a great bit where she practices the meditative martial art of tai chi at the most inopportune moments. She also maintains the nervousness expected of a woman who bursts into tears with little visible provocation.

Romer obviously spent a lot of time working on the broad comedy in *Bedroom Farce*, and the play comes off as delightful. It will continue at 8:30 p.m. through Saturday in Arena Theater at the Campus Center.



# Ayckbourn's 'Bedroom Farce' is strong Otterbein production

By Lois McCullen

Otterbein College Summer Theatre opened its 1980 season last week with delightful comedy. Alan Ayckbourn's "Bedroom Farce" gives us four couples and three bedrooms to observe in several kinds of antics and confusion. The eight student actors involved bring life and strength to the performance.

The action centers on three couples in their bedrooms who become disrupted by a fourth couple. It is traditional farce: there are mix-ups in action, misplaced identities, and misunderstood intentions. It is often predictable; it is ridiculous; it is sport.

Though Otterbein's summer company managed to stage a highly entertaining show, Monday night's dress rehearsal was void of an audience which threw the timing off. The first act was especially slow, most notably because Ayckbourn intends for his comedy to be the rapidly paced frenzy of mixed-up pairs. To some extent it works with this company; in some areas it is weak.

Theatre veterans will remember John Ebner and Tamyán Sager from previously challenging roles on the Otterbein stage and they steal this show as Ernest and Delia, the elderly couple. Ayckbourn gives this couple much to work with—they are cute. Though neither is quite the 60-ish Ayckbourn suggests, they are together most convincing as a couple who've been

married long and are accustomed to one another. These two players demonstrate a precocious sense of comic timing, especially Ebner. He knows how to pull at his audience at just the right moment for just the adequate response. In a comedy with Ebner on stage, it seems other actors often do well to even be noticed.

But Sager pulls her own and shows much talent as the mother-in-law avoiding conversation on the subject of S-E-X. She is charmingly parental and humorously patient with Susannah.

Ernest and Delia's son Trevor, played by Bruce Marvin, seems to come on a bit too strong. His character is too aggressive for Ayckbourn's intention, and his movement lacks control. In particular, he backs out of rooms and situations with his rear in the air—too unsophisticated and too unbelievable. Despite the sloppy movement, Marvin comes across well for such an inexperienced actor. Though he had a slow beginning Monday night, Marvin shows a sense of timing and interplay which is promising.

As Trevor's wife Susan-

nah, Fontaine Follansbee is given a role outside of her musical theatre repertoire. Follansbee seems to have a little trouble with this type of comedy yet, though her second act performance showed more energy and concentration than the first act. Her assertiveness training "exercises" are hysterical, but they seem out of character for Susannah—the movement is too tight and controlled for this woman; one cannot imagine her actually carrying out such training.

As Nick, Rich Tatgenhorst is confined to his bed due to a back injury. Tatgenhorst is outstanding—he knows how to make us laugh, and he gives life to the bedroom he occupies. Though many of his lines are only an agonizing "aaah" he hits them with just the right pitch (and ache).

Nick's wife Jan is Ann Doering, a guest to Otterbein from Heidelberg. Doering seems to lack some confidence among those who are more familiar with each other and with the stage in the Campus Center, but in a few moments in act two there shines some talent. Once this young actress

loosens up and better focuses her character she will be a greater asset.

Conversely, Kent State guest Jeff Garber as Malcolm seems to have walked in comfortably to the Otterbein company. Garber is even a bit too forceful as Malcolm, and sometimes his expressions and sarcastic reactions seem overdone. Malcolm becomes well-liked, though; one is sympathetic to him and amused by him. Garber's movement is smooth and realistic. Malcolm becomes real.

Opposite Garber is Linda Finnell as Kate. These two make nearly as convincing a couple as Ebner and Sager; they respond well to each other. Finnell displays a grand sense of comic pacing and a high energy level for this performance. She is a sensitive actress who shows some sophisticated versatility. And Kate and Malcolm are fun.

Ayckbourn usually calls for a challenging set; he does not let us down for "Bed-

room Farce." Fred Thayer's set is imaginative and most importantly, it works. Three bedrooms can be seen well and are designed for the arena theatre with care.

And the lighting makes the set work even greater. Lights are also no easy task, for they are crucial to the quick pace and movement from bedroom to bedroom. The technical crew deserves much credit.

Costumes are worth mention as they highlight the kind of characters Ayckbourn suggests and the definitions of each couple are magnified. Kate Lewicki has also selected some very tasteful bedroom wear.

Guest director and Otterbein alum Dennis Romer seems to have worked closely with the company allowing each student the freedom to explore his character. The set creates some blocking problems and the most successful staging occurs in Ernest and Delia's room. Romer's direction could perhaps have tightened the performance more in

order to see less of four individual unrelated couples and more of a unified action which just happens to include these eight people. Follansbee and Marvin's characters should hold the farce together, but since they don't seem quite strong enough, a more careful director's hand would have been helpful.

Romer succeeds, though, in a truly alluring show, and as a whole, the opening performance is a sensation. Though the few weak spots of inexperienced actors slows the action in places, the total farce moves well and the production is "jolly good!"

*Public Opinion*