

& comedy



THEATER TALK

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OTTERBEIN STUDENTS DIG TOES INTO HIT SIMON PLAY

BY MICHAEL GROSSBERG | THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Summer is an ideal time to feel soft grass against bare feet, and Otterbein Summer Theatre is launching its season with an apt romantic comedy.

Barefoot in the Park, the story of a young New York couple, is Neil Simon's longest-running Broadway hit.

"It's a sweet play about love — very romantic and fun," said Otterbein professor Christina Kirk, who is directing the play.

Kirk also staged Simon's *Proposals* in 1999 for Otterbein Summer Theatre.

"The critical line for me is when Paul says to Corie, 'Even when I didn't like you, I loved you.' That's the crux of it."

Elizabeth Ashley and Robert Redford starred in the original 1963 production, with Redford reprising his role in the 1967 film as uptight young lawyer Paul opposite Jane Fonda as Corie, his carefree wife.

"They've just spent six days and nights at the Plaza Hotel on their honeymoon, and this is their new adventure in nesting," Kirk said. "The Greenwich Village brownstone apartment they find is quite in shambles, but the wife is convinced it will be their romantic love nest."

At the Westerville school, Molly Wetzel and Harry Sanderson play the newlyweds, who find their first home in a fifth-floor walk-up apartment with leaking skylights, heating problems, a cramped bedroom and nosy neighbors.

"Part of the gag is that everyone who goes ... up there arrives out of breath — except Corie," Kirk said.

Corie is eternally chipper.

"Free-spirited and fun, Corie has a lot of energy and a very big heart," Wetzel said.

"She wants everyone to be



EVAN ZIMMERMAN

From left: Victor Velasco (James Scully), Mrs. Banks (Emma Brock), Paul (Harry Sanderson) and Corie (Molly Wetzel)

happy, but she has her particular way of doing things, and Corie and her husband don't quite see eye to eye. Where Corie sees the humor in every situation, Paul is more serious and practical, so they have to resolve their differences before they can be married happily."

Wetzel, a 20-year-old Otterbein senior, said she can identify easily with Corie, who wants Paul to run "barefoot in the park" — and become more relaxed and fun-loving.

"Corie and I have the same kind of energy," Wetzel said. "I understand being young and

at a glance

Barefoot in the Park

OTTERBEIN SUMMER THEATRE:
CAMPUS CENTER THEATRE,
100 W. HOME ST., WESTERVILLE
(614-823-1109, WWW.OTTERBEIN.EDU)

SHOWTIMES » 7:30 tonight;
8 p.m. Friday, Saturday and
June 14 and 16; 2 p.m. Sunday;
and 2 and 8 p.m. June 15

TICKETS » \$22

excited about a new life, love and changes."

Sanderson, meanwhile, found it easy to connect with Corie's husband.

"Paul is 26, only a few years older than I am," said Sanderson, a 21-year-old Otterbein senior. "The character is similar to me in many aspects, but I didn't want it to look as if it was just me up there."

So Sanderson focused on how to carry himself as Paul, "a clean-cut guy conservative in his social behavior."

"As funny as Neil Simon is, he writes about real relationships where the theme is you can love someone even if you don't like them all the time," he said.

"I've found that true in my life. You get past that because of how close you are."

Supporting characters include Mrs. Banks, Corie's mother, and Victor Velasco, the attic neighbor who becomes romantically interested in Mrs. Banks.

"You have two characters who are risk takers, seeking adventure: Corie and Victor Velasco,"

PLAY

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Kirk said. "Paul and Corie's mom, who want safety and security, are the ones who are really trying to control things."

The play is set in the early 1960s, the same era as the TV drama *Mad Men*.

The cast and director looked at episodes as a guide to period behavior.

"The audience might get a kick out of the connection with *Mad Men*," Kirk said. "The time period says so much that coincides with the tensions in the play between Paul and Corie."

"It was the end of the solid, steady '50s, where everybody knew their role and stuck to it, and the start of the '60s, when . . . people are questioning their roles and trying to find adventure."

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THEATER REVIEW | BAREFOOT IN THE PARK

Strong cast digs into dark areas of cute comedy

By Margaret Quamme
FOR THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Barefoot in the Park is an early Neil Simon comedy from the 1960s with an elegantly simple structure and more than a hint of darkness beneath the gags.

The Otterbein Summer Theatre production of the three-act play starts as bubbly, frothy fun and gradually deepens into an ironic commentary on the difficulties of human relationships — without losing its fundamental humor.

At the center of the play is the escalating conflict between passionate newlyweds Paul (Harry Sanderson) and Corie (Molly Wetzel) Bratter, who have, after a blissful six-day honeymoon, moved into a dilapidated fifth-floor walk-up in New York.

Paul is a conservative young lawyer, anxious because he has just been assigned his first court case; Corie is a would-be bohemian still trying to impress her suburban mother (Emma Brock), with whom she lived until the week before.

When Corie fixes up her mother with their eccentric, lecherous upstairs neighbor, Victor (James

Scully), and the quartet heads off to Staten Island for an ouzo-fueled dinner at an Albanian restaurant, the results are widening misunderstanding and an all-too-believable marital argument.

The four student actors complement one another. Wetzel's Corie is both exuberant and insecure, and her childlike excesses provoke both affection and irritation in Sanderson's reserved but likable Paul. Brock's wide-eyed mom nicely balances fondness for the young couple with an irresistible urge for guilt and one-upmanship, and Scully's Victor is just giddy enough to avoid seeming sleazy.

In smaller roles, Sam Ray is appealing as a telephone repairman caught in the middle of a marital cold war, and Sean Murphy is funny as a deliveryman



EVAN ZIMMERMAN

From left: Victor (James Scully), Paul (Harry Sanderson), Mrs. Banks (Emma Brock) and Corie (Molly Wetzel)

who finds five flights of stairs at least four too many.

The set by Brad Steinmetz has plenty of details — such as an aged steam radiator and an icebox that has seen better days — that evoke the era.

Barefoot in the Park is in many ways a period piece, and Corie in particular comes across as a woman who could have existed only in the early '60s: She is ready to run wild and seek her own identity, but she doesn't know what to do with her considerable energy besides playing house or matchmaker.

This is a romantic comedy, but it doesn't have the easy resolution that one might expect. Simon's characters, equally stubborn and very different in personality and values, love each other, but it's easy to see the years ahead of them as potentially rocky.

Director Christina Kirk lets the laughs build naturally and has a sparkling touch with physical comedy, but she doesn't downplay the sadness and anger beneath the surface of the story — which makes it more than a light diversion.

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