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ENTERTAINMENT

Otterbein offers up 'flea' market of laughs

By Michael Grossberg
Dispatch Theater Critic

All the classic elements of French farce are contained in Georges Feydeau's *A Flea in Her Ear*: confused characters, illicit intentions, hypocritical manners, double-entendres, mistaken identity and slapstick comedy.

Otterbein College's energetic production, which opened last night, polishes each element until it gleams. If the result resembles brass more than gold, blame it on the inevitable aging of Feydeau's well-constructed but creaky story.

Set in 1910 in Paris, *Flea's* romantic merry-go-round revolves around a suspicious wife, Yvonne Chandel (Diana Blazer), who's convinced that her sexually lackluster husband, Victor-Emmanuel (Ralph Scott), is a philanthropist. That's the "flea" in her ear: jealousy.

With the helping hands of her friend, Lucienne (Rachael Harris), Chandel sends her husband an anonymous love note inviting him to a secret rendezvous at the Hotel Pussycat. Her language is as guilty as her husband is inno-

REVIEW

Otterbein College Theatre will present *A Flea in Her Ear* at 8 tonight and Saturday and 2 p.m. Sunday in Cowan Hall on campus. For tickets, call 898-1109.

cent: "I'm ready to do something foolish. Will you do it with me?"

As Chandel suspects, her husband wants "a wife, a sweetheart and a mistress." What she doesn't suspect is that he has found all three in her. Victor-Emmanuel is that priceless phenomenon: the happily married man. In Feydeau's florid farce, however, that makes him doubly the fool.

You can guess what happens. Victor-Emmanuel sends an amorous friend (Steve Geyer) in his stead. Everyone else in their social circle shows up to sin or spy or both: among them, a vengeful Yvonne, a lustful Lucienne and Yvonne's frustrated cousin, Camille (Kevin Ford Carty).

Camille suffers from a speech impediment that prevents him from pronouncing his consonants. He mangles his French accent horribly — and hilariously. Carty is the boisterous stand-out of a fine ensemble cast. At Wednesday's preview, he got the lion's share of laughs.

Also extremely funny are Blazer, impulsive and flirtatious, and Scott, who makes hay in a double role. He plays the priggish husband straight, while exaggerating the awkward movements of the idiotic hotel porter who could be the husband's twin.

Scott's bouncy walk, Carty's frozen poses of stunned dismay and the other characters' frequent lunges through doorways are no accident. Director Ed Vaughan's brisk direction recasts *Flea* as a cartoon.

Guest scenic designer David Weller carries out Vaughan's concept well. His Hotel Pussycat, despite its rotating bed, approaches a two-dimensional study in scarlet lust.



Dispatch photo

Diana Blazer