

Dudley: THE FIRST NIGHTER!

On "High Spirits"

"HIGH SPIRITS". A musical based on the play "Blithe Spirit" by Noel Coward. Book, music and lyrics by Hugh Martin and Timothy Gray. Produced by the Highland Players. Directed by Art McDonald. Cast: Charles Condomine Jeff Alheim Edith Phyllis Dieth Ruth Condomine . . . Kay Comer Mrs. Bradman . . . Pat Ruffin Dr. Bradman . . . Craig Smith Mme. Arcati . . . Sally Carlson Elvira Susie Mowrey Rupert Joe Mitchell

Hippies and Ghosts: Mac Dameron, Bonnie Foster, Mary B. Higgins, Betts Hunter, Mary Key, Kathy Koch, Joe Mitchell, Traywick Newton, Denny Richards, Dawn Taylor, Sharon Weber, Laura Weigle, Chuck White, Ron Wilkerson, Julia Wilson.

Musical direction by Gayle Baldwin. Musical arrangements by Lydia Johnson and Miss Baldwin. Scenic design and technical direction by Dub Narramore. Assistant to the director: Carol Fetter. Costuming by Sally Syphrit. Lighting by Harry Hagan, Don Lawton and Doug Raynor. Sound: John Ogletree. Properties: Jane Hayman, Pat Ruffin and Cynthia Sweet. Stage manager: Jack Liggett. Originally produced in New York by the Messrs. Osterman, Fletcher and Horner. Musical numbers: Overture; "Was She Prettier Than I?"; "The Bicycle Song"; "You'd Better Love Me"; "Where Is the Man I Married?"; "The Sandwich Man"; "Go into Your Trance"; "Where Is the Man I Married?" (Reprise); "Forever and a Day"; "Something Tells Me"; "I Know Your Heart"; "Faster Than Sound"; Entr'acte: "If I Gave You"; "Talking to You"; "Home Sweet Heaven"; "Something Is Coming to Tea"; "The Exorcism"; "What in the World Did You Want?"; Finale ("Faster Than Sound"). Playing nightly in the Liberal Arts Auditorium through Saturday.

there was a favorable reaction from the audience is demonstrated by the fact that the production kept its doors open for a year.

But sadly, there is truth in what was said then: the play is shallow, the ending a potential disappointment, and only the work of the company performing can keep it cheerful and alive. The first time around, Tammy Grimes, Beatrice Lillie and their troupe did the job; now it is being done--and is being done just as able--by the Highland Players.

In the first place, the scenic production is the most ambitious and clever that this critic has seen used here. In spite of the requirement of five settings and frequent scene changes, Dub Narramore has done a remarkable job of putting into operation a system allowing for rapid changes and a flowing transition between scenes. And Sally Syphrit's costuming--more extensive, I believe, than in all the shows from the last season counted together--is nothing to slide over too quickly; both bizarre and beautiful, the costumes combine their color with that of the settings to make visual appeal one of the three elements that allow the play to be the memorable affair that it is.

The second of these elements is the musical score by Hugh Martin and Timothy Gray, who also did the rather brittle book adaptation from Noel Coward's modern classic "Blithe Spirit". The whole play, as written, is a very routine and undistinguished, if not uninspired, theatrical piece about a happily married husband and the medium who conjures up his first wife from the dead, given life solely by a pile of pleasant songs. "High Spirits" is not without hope, though: an acting company may, if they are able, perform well enough not only to offer salvation, but to give zest, bounce and gaiety to the proceedings.

This brings us to the third element of merit, a certain company of twenty-two who sing, speak and dance with a

perfect blend of piquancy and exuberance, and look as if they're having a ball doing it. Once they get the show moving--which, fortunately, they take twenty minutes or so in doing--they glide smoothly from song to song and scene to scene, garnering laughs and causing not a few feet to start tapping.

It is a shame, however, that while the musical arrangements by Gayle Baldwin and Lydia Johnson are superb and deserve to be heard, such a considerable portion of the singing is drowned out by the combo of musical accompanists. Whether this is the fault of the instrumentalists or the singers is not clear; but unless the viewer is a lip-reader, he is liable to miss a significant portion of lyrics. This is by no means anything new, for even the professional musical theater is often hampered by orchestras which, while intended as accompaniment for onstage vocalists, defeat their own purpose by making the actors inaudible. But when a five-piece band out-sounds a fifteen-member chorus, one cannot help wondering what has gone wrong.

Now it is obvious that "High Spirits" is a combination of the necessary dramatic efforts of seven principals and a chorus, and while it is logically impossible to think in terms of the play without any one or several of them, there are those in the company whose presence is not only needed, but fully irreplaceable. If it is possible to say that the show depends upon or belongs to one particular performer, then it is Susie Mowrey's show; and if ever an actress deserved to approach the footlights and take an extra bow after a performance, Miss Mowrey is the one. She is dazzling at her first entrance, and

never once lets the quality of her delivery drop. Though she is no trained singer, she performs well in her seven numbers; most notably, she does a rousing job with the solo song-and-dance routine "Home Sweet Heaven" and leads the chorus in the snappy "Faster Than Sound". In a very genuine way her enchanting portrayal of Elvira, the lead spirit, makes the show complete.

Playing opposite is Jeff Alheim, as hilarious as he has ever been, in the role of Elvira's living husband. He has one of the better singing voices found in the show, as well as his own inimitable farcical expressions; and by combining the two he is able to come on strong both as leading man, and as vocalist in a series of duets including "Where Is the Man I Married?" doubtlessly his best.

Kaye Comer is good as Mr. Alheim's second wife; and though she is weak on a few lines, she proves with the opening number that she is the best in the show in the voice department. In the principal comedy role, Sally Carlson is a remarkable mystic and a highly amusing comedian. Miss Carlson does the whole role in a put-on voice and outlandish clothes, and she displays her versatility constantly, whether she be singing and pedaling a bicycle simultaneously, or doing a soft-shoe dance with a Ouija board. And Phyllis Dieth, as the maid, only makes two or three brief appearances, but what she does is neurotically funny.

The remaining two roles, Dr. and Mrs. Bradman, are done at least adequately by Craig Smith and Pat Ruffin, though the pair is the least likely to be long remembered of any of the cast. Neither one sings at all; as far as their acting goes, he is

the weaker, suffering from a lack of tone modulation. Miss Ruffin's part is almost too small to stand as sufficient criterion for judgment, and she doesn't play it with any unique style that might allow it to stand out.

The major problem, as stated earlier, is very simply that the play is shallow. It is not unattractive in itself, though, and is performed brilliantly by this company. As far as musical productions go, "High Spirits", as done here under the stage direction of Art McDonald, is hard to beat. And as long as a show of this quality is such a rare phenomenon, this critic most heartily advises, as did those five others before him, that anyone with a taste for good theater, or simply with an inclination toward an evening of musical fun, not miss this entrancing opportunity.

LAUREL HILL FALL HORSE SHOW
Sponsored By
Sand Hill Saddle Club
Sat., Oct. 19, 1968
12 NOON
Fair Vue Farm & Stables
Highway 74
Midway Between
Laurinburg & Hamlet

Officials
Judge **J. Ed. Allen**
Rock Hill, S. C.
Ringmaster **Ed Williams**
Edgemoor, S. C.

Electronic Timers

ADMISSION
Adults \$1.00 Children \$.50

FREE DOOR PRIZE DRAWING FOR \$100.00

Four years ago, after New York had seen the premiere of a new musical called "High Spirits", six city papers carried reviews of the show, and of them five were lavish in their praise. (Five approvals out of six reviews is by far a better-than-average reception). The critics did agree, however, that the show's appeal was found more in the players, the music and the visual production than in the book of the play. That

WEBB FLORAL
Say It with Flowers



1023 S. Main 276-1420

An Invitation to Join

BARRON MILLS, Inc.

Highland Sport Shop

CHARGE ACCOUNT

Yes, Especially for You We Offer You 30 - 60 - 90 Day Charge Accounts With No Carrying Charge. We Have Some of the Best Lines for Him or Her.


Come In Today and Open Your Account
Monogram Free on Any Sweater \$20 & up

BARRON MILLS

HIGHLAND SPORT SHOP
Main Street, Laurinburg, N. C.

NEW BY MAX FACTOR

The All-Go Fragrance For Today's All-Go College Man



Ultra Lucent Blush Creme Lipstick and Blushing Nail Color

Annual Sale One-Third Off Swedish Formula Hand Creme

Also Coty E'lon Fragrance

Scotland Drug