

'The Rivals' succeeds with vivid characters

When parents and children and lovers try to match wits in the game of control, the result is sure to be explosive. In Richard Sheridan's "The Rivals," performed by PlayMakers Repertory Company (PRC), the conflicts erupt into a comedy full of interesting and engaging characters.

Betty Leighton's portrayal of Mrs. Malaprop — whose comic distortion of language gave us the term "malapropism" — is a definite highlight of the play. Absolute's loud and contagious guffawing combine with his sarcasm and wit to make his character both entertaining and endearing. His alternating empathy and stubborn disapproval toward his son show Andersen's ability to make smooth and comic transitions between a variety of different reactions.

Her nonsensical phrases are made even more hilarious by her ironic emphasis on proper grammar. In both voice and gesture, Leighton completely embodies all the color and eccentricity

Lisa Weckerle Theater

built into the personality of the headstrong Mrs. Malaprop.

Conspiring with Mrs. Malaprop, Sir Anthony Absolute, played by Tobias Andersen, adds to the comedy of the play. Absolute's loud and contagious guffawing combine with his sarcasm and wit to make his character both entertaining and endearing. His alternating empathy and stubborn disapproval toward his son show Andersen's ability to make smooth and comic transitions between a variety of different reactions.

Some of the funniest moments of the show are between Sir Anthony

Absolute and Mrs. Malaprop. Although the two are each amusing on their own, the simultaneous appearance of the two eccentrics proves to be a hilarious combination.

Another striking comic performance is Susanna Rinehart's Lucy, the sprightly, street-smart maid to Mrs. Malaprop. Rinehart performs Lucy with a tremendous energy and cleverness that embodies the spirit of youth. The only flaw of the performance was the sparseness of Lucy's presence on stage. With a character so appealing and an actress so talented, it is a shame that she was not given more stage time.

Other notable performances include the two sets of young lovers. Captain Jack Absolute, played by Matthew Ryan, and Lydia Languish, played by Lisa Benedict, explore the range of emotions of young love. The corresponding love affair of Faulkland, played by Thomas Gunning, and Julia Melville, played by Pilar Herrera, follows a very different course, but in the end both affairs leave the audience with the inspirational — if over-simplified — message that any obstacle can be overcome.

A major strength of the play is the prominence of timeless themes which interested both Sheridan's and PRC's audiences equally. The complicated and often conflicting struggles between the generations offers universal appeal while providing situations rich with comic hypocrisy.

While Mrs. Malaprop's attitude toward Lydia emphasizes the differences between elders and youth, the father-son relationship between Sir Anthony Absolute and his son, Jack, hints at the similarity between the generations.

Sir Anthony Absolute's humor arises from his conflicting desire to control Jack and to befriend him as well. Complaining of the stubbornness of his son, Absolute asks ironically, "Who could he take after?" Obviously he takes after his father, and the audience sees that both Absolute and his son are blind to the fact that they have an awful lot in common. The subtle and ironic presentation of conflict brings out the humor in the misunderstandings between the generations.

To an audience unfamiliar with Sheridan's play, the intricate plot of "The Rivals" can be confusing. Sheridan presents so many suitors that in some scenes, especially those including Sir Anthony O'Trigger, the audience is puzzled about the relevance and identity of the character. Because O'Trigger's role is so ambiguous, his scenes fail to hold the attention of the audience. Although at the play's conclusion the audience understands how the characters fit together in the plot, the initial confusion detracts from the overall comedy of the play.

The extremely vivid characterizations of Mrs. Malaprop, Sir Anthony Absolute and Lucy make "The Rivals" amusing and entertaining to watch. The enveloping themes of power struggles, generational gaps and the mystery of young love combine with strong individual performances to keep the audience laughing.

The PlayMakers Repertory Company concludes the 1989-90 season with "The Rivals." The play will run from April 18 until May 13 in the Paul Green Theatre at 8 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays and at 2 p.m. Sundays. For more information, please call the box office at 962-PLAY.



Betty Leighton, left, and Tobias Andersen in the PlayMakers production

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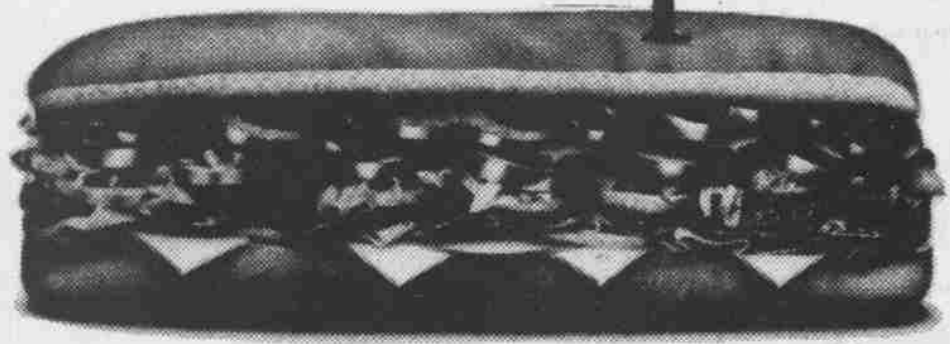
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Arts & Entertainment THIS WEEK

- On Monday, April 23:
- Scrawl with Afghan Wigs will be at Cat's Cradle at 10 p.m. Call 967-9053 for more information.
 - A Group Sing will be at Columbia Street Bakery at 8:30 p.m. Call 967-9150 for information.
 - His Boy Elroy will perform a benefit at Players for the Orange County Rape Crisis Center at 9 p.m. Call 968-4847 for more information.
 - The Lab Theatre presents Bertolt Brecht's "The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui" at 4 p.m. and 8 p.m. Also Tuesday at 5 p.m.
- On Tuesday, April 24:
- Buddy-Boy Vaughn will be at The Cave at 9:30 p.m. Call 968-9308 for more information.
 - Irish Music Picking Session will be at Columbia Street Bakery at 8:30 p.m. Call 967-9150 for information.
 - UNC Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Tonu Kalam, will play in Hill Hall at 8 p.m. Call 962-1039 for more information.
- On Wednesday, April 25:
- Liquid Sound will be at Cat's Cradle at 10 p.m.
 - Hugh Moffatt will be at The Cave at 9:30 p.m. Call 968-9308 for more information.
 - Andy Church and Carter Minor will perform jazz music at Spanky's,
- upstairs, at 10 p.m. Call 962-6260 for more information.
- Paul Tardif and the East Carolina University Jazz Ensemble will be at Pyewacket at 10 p.m. Call 929-0297 for more information.
 - The Chris Cain Blues Band will be at Magdalena's La Terraza at 10 p.m. Call 967-MAGS for info.
 - Midday With Chris Brown will be in the Union Cabaret at noon.
- On Thursday, April 26:
- Scruffy the Cat and Knockin' Boots will be at Cat's Cradle at 10 p.m. Call 967-9053 for information.
 - Billy Miller will be at Columbia Street Bakery at 8:30 p.m.
 - Exit Eden will be at the Hardback Cafe at 10 p.m. Call 933-5100 for more information.
 - WXYC night at Magdalena's La Terraza.
 - Kat in the Hat will be at Skylight Exchange at 9:30 p.m. Call 933-5550 for more information.
 - Student Composer's Concert, directed by Roger Hannay, will be performed in Hill Hall at 8 p.m.
- Continuing This Week:
- "The Rivals," presented by PlayMakers, Tuesdays through Saturdays at 8 p.m. and Sundays at 2 p.m. until May 13 in the Paul Green Theatre.
 - "Native American Art and Crafts," an art exhibit on the second floor of the Health Sciences Library, will be on display until April 30.
 - Rik Keller and Robin Hood Diät II, a photography exhibit, will be on display in the Carolina Union Gallery until May 13.
- compiled by Diana Florence

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