

# THE FIRST NIGHTER!

Directed by Arthur McDonald. Cast: Corlie Bratter... Peggy Harp Telephone Man... Jim Pope Delivery Man... Steve Wilson Paul Bratter... Hugh Helm Mrs. Banks... Linda Logan Victor Velasco, Bill Forrest

Technical direction by Howard Cobbs. Construction supervision: John Biba. Backdrop designed by Mark Smith. Costumes by Sue Slaney. Lighting, by David Dolge et. al. Makeup: Glenda Buck. Props: Mary Bradley. Stage Manager: Danny Mitzell.

It has been suggested to me that a review whose release precedes the opening of the show it covers by more than four hours cannot be entirely fair, if fair at all. I've seen "Barefoot in the Park" four times now, the last three times being the dress rehearsals this week. (The first was a presentation by the national touring company about two years ago.) And after all, last night's performance -- whence cometh this article -- was only the final dress rehearsal. But after all, last night's performance was awfully good.

So good, in fact, that I am moved to call it very near perfect. The one element essential to "Barefoot" is what the Highland Players have strived for, and what they have succeeded in capturing: its freshness. It is at times airy, at times bitter, at times painful, at times touching; but it is consistently funny, and its pungent wit is a sharp punctuation to its sunny freshness.

Paul and Corlie Bratter are a newly-married couple (six days married, actually, and just back from their honeymoon) living on New York's Forty-second Street in the top floor of an ancient brownstone which apparently towers above everything else in the city. I wish I could say they were happily married, but they aren't always -- at least they don't always think they are. But if they're at times unhappy, I guarantee the audience won't be.

Paul is performed by a new arrival, Hugh Helm, who is one of the funniest people that ever

## "barefoot in the park"

stormed or limped or tripped his way across the local stage. He plays an inexperienced lawyer in his twenties, somewhat on the stuffy side of straight, and an inexperienced husband in curious contrast to his vivacious wife. He glows, non-stop.

And the wife is another new face, the twice-beautiful Peggy Harp -- that is, her acting is as beautiful as her looks. She covers the range from hysterically real to really hysterical, being sometimes brimming with the eccentricities of the young and more often than not aggravated by her frustratingly square husband. Her debut, in as few words as possible, is a joyous happening -- and I think you're going to be very glad she has happened. What a shame that she and Mr. Helm are ineligible for Tony awards!

The plot is thickened by Corlie's mother (whose hobbies are worrying and making herself miserable just about everywhere), played with frenetic gusto by Linda Logan, and Victor Velasco, who may be described as an uninhibited Hungarian or a dirty old man living in an attic (or both), and

whom Bill Forrest interprets with verve. Suffice it to say that both Miss Logan and Mr. Forrest are excellent; they are (or ought to be) well-known by now, and their reputations as actors have long since been settled.

No less in comedy are the brief appearances by a telephone man (Jim Pope) who'd like not to ever see the Bratters again and who says funny things he probably doesn't mean to, and a Lord-and-Taylor delivery man (Steve Wilson) who'd like to die peacefully and who says precious little. They round out the cast, and meet its precedent for excellence.

The scenic design and backdrop are ambitious and impressive, which is in keeping with everything else about the show, including the advance ticket sale. And it might be worth noting here that since virtually all available seats have been sold for the four-night run (Thursday and Saturday are already sold out), the director has announced that the run will be extended for a fifth performance on Monday night. Those who had trouble getting seats before now have another chance.

And I strongly advise them



to take advantage of that chance. "Barefoot in the Park" is about the most riotous comedy in recent memory done by the Players, and one of the most successful American comedies ever written.

Neil Simon, who is also responsible for "Promises, Promises" and "The Odd Couple" (to name just two of many) is clearly a genius specializ-

ing in human nature. The characters in "Barefoot" are funny because they are written as real people in real situations, and they are played that way. Most playgoers doubtless will recognize a little of themselves somewhere here -- and when you stop to think about it, it's the bits of life and bits of us that make this show so very rich in its humor.

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