



Cast members of the University Players' February production of *The Odd Couple* await the next question during a trivial pursuit game the "girls" gather weekly to play. They are (from left), Camille Haith (Vera), Donna Simons (Mickey), Trisha Griffin (Florence Unger), Robin Gresham (Olive Madison), Tonya Turner (Renee), and LaVonne McClain (Sylvia.)

## Players score another comic hit with Neil Simon's *The Odd Couple*

By Tarsha White

The male version of Neil Simon's famous comedy, *The Odd Couple* may have been funny, but the new female version, as performed by the University Players under the direction of Shawn Smith, is simply hilarious.

Despite an exceptionally short rehearsal time, the cast shines in split-second comic timing, slapstick humor, and characters' chemistry.

Florence Unger (Tresha R. Griffin) and Olive Madison (Robin T. Gresham) bring new meaning to the phrase "opposites attract." Olive, who is separated from her husband and living the single life in her own apartment in New York City, seems to be reasonably stable and secure with her life. Florence, on the other hand, has just been dumped by her husband, leaving behind a 14-year marriage and two young children. As a result of her trials, Florence goes through a long period of depression.

Act One opens with Olive and her friends, Mickey (Donna Simons), Sylvie (LaVonne L. McClain), Renee (Tonya E. Turner), and Vera (Camille Haith), sitting around the kitchen table playing

cards and having a little "girl talk." During the game, Olive receives a call from her worrisome ex-husband, who constantly calls asking for money--large sums of money. Olive, prodded by the girls, attempts to tell him where to go but ends up giving in and agrees to send more money. Her friends snicker their disappointment, causing Olive to tell them where to go.

Later that night, Olive and the girls learn that Florence's husband had told her that he wanted a divorce. They are anxious to find Florence, who has disappeared, having left behind a "suicide" telegram. With Florence being as unstable and ditsy as she is, some of the girls fear the worst, while some think Florence only wants attention.

"She's going to kill herself, I know it," says Olive.

"I can't believe that," says another. "She even wears her seatbelt at a drive-in movie."

When Florence shows up at Olive's apartment, her friends don't want her to know that they have heard the news so they feign indifference. Despite the girls' relief to see her, they are still concerned about her possibly

committing suicide.

"Ooohhh, what am I going to dooo," whines Florence. She cries on Olive's shoulder, and starts saying "suicidal things."

The girls do not want to leave her alone. When she tries to go to the restroom, they all stand by the door to make sure she doesn't kill herself. The girls listen at the door, and when they hear her coming out they all scatter to get to their chairs. Quickly realizing they are in the wrong positions, they get up and take their correct seats, acting as if they have been playing the entire time.

The audience is, of course, delighted by all of this comic activity.

When Florence reappears, she finally tells them about her husband, going into hysterics. After they finally get Florence to calm down, the others go home, leaving Olive alone with her. Olive, feeling sympathetic and also somewhat lonely in her own right, offers to let Florence move in until she gets herself together. Florence agrees and immediately begins to straighten up the messy domicile and.

By the second act, after a couple

of weeks of Olive's "filthiness" and Florence's "cleanliness," the two just can't seem to get along; which begins to affect the rest of the girls, who still meet to play Trivial Pursuit once a week.

Some of the most humorous scenes in the play are of Olive and Florence ranting and raving at one another.

In another comic scene, Olive convinces Florence to double-date with her and the two Spanish brothers who live upstairs. Florence starts crying because she misses her husband, eliciting tears of sympathy from the brothers Manolo and Jesus (Clarence Jones, Jr. and Cordell Garrett) who had divorced their own wives in Spain before coming to America. This was one of the most humorous moments of the second act.

Tresha and Robin performed the roles of Florence and Olive with a sense of authenticity and ease.

The couple's strong bond is ultimately able to overcome all obstacles in the relationship. Underneath the comic surface of this play, this is a story about the glue that holds relationships and special friendships together, despite the strain of differences.