

Coco, Donovan add spice to "Never Too Late"

By WALTER SPEARMAN
Staff Writer

If the success of Bill Hartigan's new policy of bringing big name stars to his Village Dinner Theater needs proving, the laugh fest accompanying his "Never Too Late" with Imogene Coca and King Donovan proves it. And for that happy, versatile pair of old pros, Coca and Donovan, it was indeed "never too late" for them to triumphantly capture their audience, getting a standing ovation and provide a hilarious evening in the theater.

The wave of success started by Margaret O'Brien and Martha Raye crests with Coca and Donovan, a husband and wife acting team who have appeared together in such shows as "Once Upon a Mattress," "A Thurber Carnival," and "The Prisoner of Second Avenue." They have given over 500 performances of their own production of "The Fourposter."

It's a joy to see Coca and Donovan acting together. Their ensemble acting, their split second timing, their double takes, their silent pantomime responses, all combine to lift "Never Too Late" to rare comedy.

"Never Too Late" records what happens when a middle-aged couple suddenly discovers they are about to become parents

again, much to the consternation of their spoiled daughter, their sponging son-in-law and their surprised friends. Edith Lampert (Imogene Coca) goes out to get a new hair-do and a manicure in celebration and her manicurist says: "Sister, there may be life in the old man yet!" And there is—but Harry Lambert (King Donovan) is appalled when the workers at his furniture plant wheel in a new baby carriage containing a two-by-four wrapped in a blanket.

A comedy highlight of the evening comes when Edith drops her pregnant bomb. Her husband Harry is in the midst of an animated argument with his daughter and son-in-law, the overgrown children who refuse to assume responsibility. When they finally realize what has happened, Harry rushes to his wife and sends Kate into the kitchen (evidently for the first time in her sheltered life). All Edith needs to do is sigh: "I feel faint" for the whole family to capitulate. Unwilling daughter Kate decides her only recourse is to get pregnant, too—so she looks appraisingly at her husband Charlie and announces: "I'm making the roast rare!"

So is the comedy. Imogene Coca, veteran of that beloved old TV "Your Show of Shows" with Sid Caesar, can do no wrong on stage. Her worn, lined face is blessedly beautiful, her every movement has a lilt, and

her voice is warmly human. A mere lift of the hand, a catch in the voice, a tentative smile, conveys her meaning. King Donovan as the surprised father-to-be works with her beautifully, ranting and raving, gruff and tender, but his hard work sometimes shows through; and his interpretation would be more appealing if he would occasionally lower the boom of his performance.

hell. And son-in-law Charlie (Richard Blair), amusing in his very ineptness, rises to heights of humor in his drunken scene with Harry, which brought a hand from the house for the two of them.

Producer Bill Hartigan, beaming over the full house for "Never Too Late," announced that next month's show would be "Wake Up, Darling," with Robert Reed of "The Brady



King Donovan appears in "Never Too Late" at the Village Dinner Theatre.

Rita Rudner as daughter Kate, more eager to be waited on than to work, seems bumptiously flighty at first but does a splendid job in her telephone scene with Charlie when she finally tells him to go to

Bunch" as guest star. This will be followed by a return engagement of "South Pacific" in September and the appearance of award-winning actor Broderick Crawford in October.

United States Marine Corps



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