

'Same Time Next Year' humorous, but shallow

By Debra L. Miller

Same Time, Next Year, which opened at the Lincoln Community Playhouse Friday, February 29, is a sentimental play that appeals to the romantic and the nostalgic in the hearts of the viewers.

Written in 1975 by Bernard Slade, the play was a long-running hit on Broadway, and was recently adapted for the screen with Alan Alda and Ellen Burstyn in the leading roles.

theater review

The script's popularity (and many of its failings) is linked to the novelty of the premise. The characters, George and Doris, both fairly happily married to their respective spouses, meet and fall in love at an out-of-the-way inn in California. Unable to break the relationship, but equally unwilling to give up their comfortably married family lives, they resolve to go on meeting for one week-end "same time, next year."

This device enables the playwright to telescope 25 years of his characters' lives into 6 scenes at five-year intervals. By so doing, he is able to follow the pair

through many of the "passages" and difficult periods of adult life.

The audience is not bothered too much by the portrayal of the essentially illicit relationship. Doris and George are both decent, likable people sincerely devoted to their families. But the premise seems too much the ultimate cop-out. It is, in the end, only the playwright's gimmick or device to isolate two people at different stages of their lives.

In effect, the same situation repeats itself, with only the ages changed. "Outside" events are discussed, opinions exchanged to reveal the characters' growth or lack thereof.

In his effort to reflect the cultural trends of the 50s, 60s and 70s, Slade often reduces his characters to stereotypes, personifications of an era. For example, Doris change from a naive, demure Eisenhower-era matron to outrageously "cool" Berkeley-style hippie may be comically amusing, but is hardly credible in terms of the character.

Perhaps the only way to make this play really work lies in the portrayal of George and Doris. Only if the actors supply the depth and believability that the script lacks can the audience really come to care about and be touched by the events and people onstage.

Although Playhouse veteran Lee Schoonover gives a sterling performance as George, Joyce Ebmeier's Doris

never emerges out of the stereotypes and cliches as a real person.

Schoonover has many fine comedic moments, and still manages to convey the vulnerability of a decent man confused by advancing age and time. Unfortunately, Ebmeier plays largely on one level of antic comedy, only intermittently revealing the searching woman within. Largely due to these flaws, the loving relationship between the two only occasionally rings true.

Director Scott Lank seems to have directed the play with the major emphasis on comedic effect. Without establishing the depth and believability of both characters, and the reality of their relationship, the play is a funny but shallow comedy of situations and one-liners.

The set by Laurel Shoemaker is suitably picturesque and versatile. Costumes by Kay Ahrens and sound by Cathy Madden-Metz aid in conveying the advancing years.

This is perhaps a play that is lent poignance and believability by the recognition that comes with age. The largely middle-aged audience at the performance last Saturday night thoroughly enjoyed the play, enough to give it a standing ovation. If popularity of a play is proof of quality, then the additional performances scheduled for March 21, 22, and 23 are certainly points in its favor.

But for this viewer, although this production of *Same Time, Next Year* pulled all the right strings for comedy, sentiment, pathos and nostalgia, it remained a superficial and therefore unsatisfying piece of theater.



Photo by Mitch Hrdlicka

Still life

These paintings, done by William Wiedner, are part of the Graduate Art Exhibition collection being displayed in the Union Lobby. Wiedner's paintings are entitled "Still Life" and "Self Portrait."

The Clash...

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They play around with their new rhythms and backing horn section extensively, sometimes taking a harmless and simple little melody on "Jimmy Jazz," "Spanish Bombs," and "Wrong 'Em Boyo" and manipulating it to create a vague musical curiosity. The same formula works more effectively on "Koka Kola," and "Lost In The Supermarket."

Sneaks home

When The Clash sneaks back to its home turf, they settle in more comfortably. The title track is a brooding account of England's state-of-the-art depressing condition, punctuated by occasional blasts from Mick Jones' guitar. "The Guns of Brixton" takes it a step further to relay a call to arms among British youth.

Strangely enough, the most blatantly listenable song on *London Calling* is credited nowhere on the album and is not even listed on the label. It is a harmonica-accented rhythm and blues based piece that will probably give The Clash their first noticeable airplay, but if giving the song no acknowledgement on the album is a clue to the nature of the band's intentions, it's anybody's guess as to what they are.

Those who never liked The Clash, will not be swayed by the band's relative softening. And hard-line Clash fans may wince at the cute harmonies and slick studio production, on *London Calling*. So with all its musical and social savvy, The Clash has chosen to become a curious enigma, and gives its anxious following 18 new songs from England for the divided camps to digest as they will.

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