

Solid cast saves the day in 'Sylvia'

By **PATRICK KELLY**
Staff Writer

A love triangle between a man, his wife and his talking dog. No, it's not an episode of Jerry Springer, it's A.R. Gurney's play "Sylvia" directed by Brant Pope.

Greg, played by Richard McWilliams, is a disenchanted New York stockbroker living the mundane upper middle-class existence. Greg finds salvation from his mid-life crisis in a stray mutt he finds in a park.

Immediately he falls in love. Soon Sylvia (Ashley West) occupies all of Greg's time. Greg's wife, Kate, (Virginia Ness) is a successful teacher who wanted to savor her golden years. All that changed when Greg brought his bitch home.

While the premise is imaginative, the confrontations become repetitive. Scene after scene finds Kate complaining about Sylvia stealing her husband away from her. However, the production is saved by the solid performances of he cast.

McWilliams' performance is

impressive in that he brings a sympathetic quality to his role, the audience genuinely feels sorry for him. The same can be said about Ness' performance. It would be easy to label her as the straight-woman with the slow, but steadily burning fuse. However, Ness plays the part first with a sense of sophistication and then regresses to a primitive state out of jealousy. This is evident with humorous effect when Ness gets on all fours to square off with Sylvia.

The great comedian W.C. Fields once said that he never wanted to work with children or animals because they stole the scene. That being the case, Mr. Fields would certainly shy away from a scene with

THE FACTS

Title: "Sylvia"
Stars: **Ashely West, Richard McWilliams, Virginia Ness, Eric Moyer**
Director: **Brant Pope**
Grade: **B+**

Ashley West. West brought to the title character a level of unmatched enthusiasm and energy. However, West did this with a sense of restraint so as not to go over the top. West's combined the normal canine mannerisms with a street-smart New York attitude.

Of course the supporting cast

keeps the humor up. In this case, the supporting cast is comprised of one actor playing three roles. Moyer plays Tom, the intellectual albeit chauvinistic friend of Greg's. Moyer also plays Kate's confidant, Phyllis, the well-to-do socialite. Moyer then astounds the audience as Leslie, the pale-faced, androgynous marriage counselor.

The production of the play captured the mood perfectly. The set which combined an apartment with the Manhattan skyline subtly added to the ambiance of the play as did the Sinatra songs during the transitions between scenes.

The play serves as an insightful look at humanity provided by man's best friend.

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Wilde play makes an uneasy transition to screen

By **SAMUEL MCKEWON**
Editor

It helps to be familiar with the actors in "An Ideal Husband" to really enjoy it and even then, it isn't easy.

Based on an Oscar Wilde play, "An Ideal Husband" isn't a particularly enthralling movie. It's mildly funny, somewhat romantic and relatively well-acted. Hardly a great comedy, though.

Set in 1895, Wilde takes us to England and into the world of Lord Goring (Rupert Everett), a well-off gent who's in no hurry to work or get married. He's 36 (he only admits to 32) and most men are married by then.

His best friend, Sir Robert Chiltern (Jeremy Northam) is one of those married men, and he has an ascending career in politics and an iron-clad reputation for integrity.

Along comes Mrs. Cheveley (Julianne Moore) to wreck that reputation. She knows how Chiltern gained his wealth (through fraud), which helped him gain his position in the Parliament. Chiltern is determined to

keep his reputation, but even more concerned to how his wife (Cate Blanchett) will see him, as she demands high morals.

Moore has devious fun with Cheveley, who intends to blackmail Chiltern into supporting a money scheme in which she has most of the money invested. In steps Goring, who had a previous affair with Cheveley, to help his friend, with imperfect results.

Much of the movie's pleasure revolves around Wilde's prose, and much of the best lines are given to Goring, which Everett mumbles through. He isn't bad, nor is Northam as Chiltern, but the real successes are Moore and Blanchett, who's quickly becoming as strong an actress as Emma Thompson. Blanchett has that same regal quality about her and brings it here to a woman who realizes her standards may be set too high for even herself to achieve.

There isn't much suspense in "An Ideal Husband" beyond the outcome Chiltern's predicament, which isn't presented in a way to really make us care. Moore's character seems to have a point

The Facts

Title: "An Ideal Husband"
Stars: **Rupert Everett, Cate Blanchett, Julianne Moore**
Director: **Oliver Parker**
Rating: **PG-13** (language, sexuality)
Running Time: **1:36** (96 minutes)
Grade: **C+**
Five Words: **Enjoyable, but " Husband" hardly hilarious**

when she claims we all pay for our past mistakes - it is simply Chiltern's time.

There's another story involving Goring and Chiltern's sister Mabel (Minnie Driver). Both seem to fancy each other, and it is possible they will be together at the end.

While some of Wilde's other plays have real power, this one exists mostly for whimsy, or at least the movie portrays it that way, bypassing any real suffering the characters might go through. You suspect all will end well in "An Ideal Husband," especially after the lone villain leaves. The people involved are just too nice to be unhappy. It's a surprisingly unsordid tale for our sordid times.

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