



Performing, on stage

'Murder' is killer comedy



Three actors, three acts and three different bedspreads on the Ho Jo's doubles—it's a fail-safe formula for \$3 worth of laughs at the Brass Rail's cabaret theater this week and next.

The Cascade Balzac Company, one of the Brass Rail's regular performing groups, has kicked off its fall season with Ron Clark's and Sam Bobrick's hit comedy, "Murder at the Howard Johnson's." Just like Howard Johnson's, it's hilariously predictable; a bit like murder, it has its capricious twists and turns.

The play is loaded with cheap furnishings, good lines and extravagant absurdities. It takes shots at the petty afflictions that plague us today, including dentists, open marriage, terminal middle-class life, self-indulgence and self-realization.

The story winds around three rather pedestrian folks—just this side of tacky—all mired in their own particular version of escaping middle-class and middle-age boredom.

Arlene Miller (J. L. Steiger) is married to Paul Miller (Don Scorby). Paul worships Arlene and works his tail off in a used-car lot so that he can buy her things, especially watches. Arlene has fallen in love, or lust, with the Miller dentist, Mitchell Lovell (John Duncan), a swinging-single Casanova. "I'm a dentist," Mitchell tells Paul, trying to convince him to divorce Arlene in order to avoid having to murder him. "I can have any woman I want."

Unable to persuade Paul, Arlene and Mitchell attempt to knock him off in Room 514. That's just



John Duncan, who plays a swinging single dentist, is in cahoots with the man holding the gun (Don Scorby). They're plotting one of the Howard Johnson's murders. J. L. Steiger plays Arlene, the potential victim.

the first act, though, and the tables turn. Six months later, Paul and Arlene mastermind the philandering dentist's murder in yet another Ho Jo suite. Not good enough, Paul and Mitchell become conspirators in another motel room, another six months hence. This time, Arlene's disposal is on their minds.

The best part of "Murder," other than its fast-paced production, is the comic interplay between the male leads, Duncan and Scorby. They're the co-producers of Cascade Balzac, which they formed in 1982, and they've pulled off consistently good acting in all of their local productions, including "Sex on the Second Floor" and "The Public Eye." Scorby's endearing splay-foot performance is a perfect foil for Duncan's ersatz-snob characters that he portrays so well. These guys

have a delightful comic chemistry and it's rare that either flattens a line.

Cascade Balzac does seem to still be looking for the perfect woman to complete its productions. Steiger, as hard a worker as she is on stage, has a difficult job keeping her shrill, dingy Arlene from going overboard. Nevertheless, she does an admirable job of adjusting her role to the fake cubist paintings and princess phones that turn up in every Howard Johnson's. Assistant director Jacs Bruscato adds her talent for set detail in replicating the three suites so precisely.

"Murder" runs tonight and Saturday, and Oct. 5 through 8. Curtain time is 9 p.m. and reservations are required.

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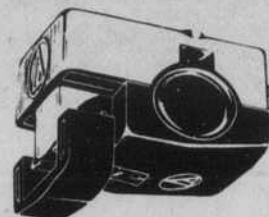
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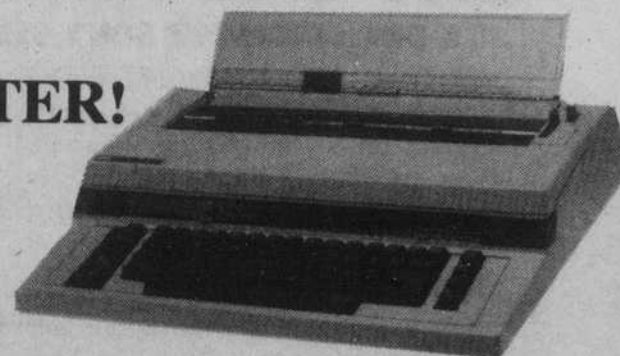
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