

'The Rivals' satirizes lifestyle in 18th century British society

As the lights dim, whispering ceases as the audience awaits the first scene of Richard Brinsley Sheridan's "The Rivals," a play satirizing the manners and fads of 18th century British society.

Disguised as the ensign Beverley, Captain Jack Absolute (William Weir III) is the perfect English gentleman courting Lydia Languish (Barbara Pitts), who lives in a world of romance novels and fantasies.

Absolute's servant Fag (Doug Chausow) describes Lydia as a lady who likes his master "better as a half-pay ensign than if she knew he was a son and heir to Sir Anthony Absolute, a baronet with three thousand a year!"

The play unfolds as Jack rapidly loses control of the situation, with some help from the meddlings of his father, Sir Anthony Absolute (Kevin Allen). Jack's disguise as an ensign soon is discovered when Sir Anthony prompts his unwilling son into visiting the "ravishing" Lydia and her aunt, Mrs. Malaprop (Grant McKernie).

Because of their presence in the room, Jack is unable to hide the truth. Lydia's dreams of a glorious, novel-like romance with a poor servant are shattered, and she sighs, "So, there will be no elopement after all!"

Sir Anthony's hypocritical nature is wonderfully portrayed by Allen as he stomps, yells and pouts like a child when, enraged by Jack's obstinate behavior, he screams, "You rely on the mildness of my temper. You play upon the meekness of my disposition. The patience of a saint may be overcome at last. I may in time forgive you. If not, don't enter the same hemisphere with me!"

McKernie, director of the University's speech department, gives a hilarious portrayal of the simpering Mrs. Malaprop and practical-

ly steals the show. He convincingly portrays a woman who is every bit as hypocritical as Sir Anthony.

Not only does Mrs. Malaprop abuse the high society language of the era in her efforts to fit in, but her views of the proper actions "becoming of a young woman" are full of double standards. The audience sees this in the exchange between Mrs. Malaprop and her maid, Lucy, when Mrs. Malaprop says, "If ever you betray what you are entrusted with — unless it be other people's secrets to me — you forfeit my malevolence forever, and your being a simpleton shall be no excuse for your locality."

Sir Lucius O'Trigger (Phillip Dunn) is the typical Irish character — talkative, flirtatious and belligerent. He tries to convince Acres (Wade Johnson) to fight a duel against Beverley to "protect his honor," but he himself is deathly afraid of challenging Jack to a duel.

The performances of the actors are complemented by award-winning designer Alexandra Bonds' costumes, which provide visual humor and bring out the odd personality traits of the characters.

Director Jack Watson's interpretation of Sheridan's "The Rivals" is a hilarious and entertaining production that is well worth the time and effort to see. The ironic situations that occur throughout the play keep the audience constantly entertained.

"The Rivals" continues its run March 14-15. Showtime is 8 p.m. and prices are \$5.50 for the general public and \$3.50 for students. Tickets can be purchased at the University Theatre Box Office by calling 686-4191.

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