

Cynical society investigated in Feiffer's "Little Murders"

By Steve Lundgren
Of The Print

Mass cynicism and rampant paranoia is no laughing matter, or is it?

"Little Murders," a two-act comedy by the master of sardonic wit, Jules Feiffer, performed at Clackamas Community College by Jack Shield's merry troupe of theater people, may just settle that question.

"Murders" is a grotesque view of urban society view of urban society in America represented by a middle-class family that struggles feebly to preserve its traditional values despite the insane, violent atmosphere in which it lives. As is par for Feiffer's work, "Murders" is a tongue-in-cheek social statement that will leave the viewer with a knot in his stomach, either from laughter or sheer disgust. The mood of the play is set immediately by the New York children's street chant, "2,4,6,8, who do we assassinate," printed on the inside cover of the program. From pot-shots in the street and a heavy breathing caller, to the eventual violence that directly touches the family, the characters are subjected to a constant barrage of insanity that eventually overtakes them.

Although this story is billed as a comedy, it is truly a tragedy. Its humor comes not from the plot or theme, for it is

heavy stuff, but from the cast's intense interpretation of a very satirical script. Feiffer made use of gags about family, hysteria and homosexuality, plus over-exaggerated paranoia when he wrote "Murders." These are the mainstay of an otherwise simple story. Adding to the humor is the dialogue which has all the subtlety of a howitzer, at least in the College's rendition.

The story centers on the marriage of Patsy Newquist, the family's strong-willed daughter, played by Amy DeVour, and Alfred Chamberlain, a neurotic photographer played by Sean Carlson. Although Alfred becomes the protagonist, the first act is dominated by Patsy and her aggressive coercion of him and her attempts to make the family accept her fiancé (and symbolically, everyone) for what he is.

DeVour's portrayal of Patsy is effective if not entirely convincing. Because Patsy is the only normal, realistic character in the play, DeVour was required to play the part intensely and avoid exaggeration, something she did well but shakily. Alfred, on the other hand, is a very strange character. The catch word for him would be pure hyperbole. Carlson treated this part very well, with a touch of melodrama.

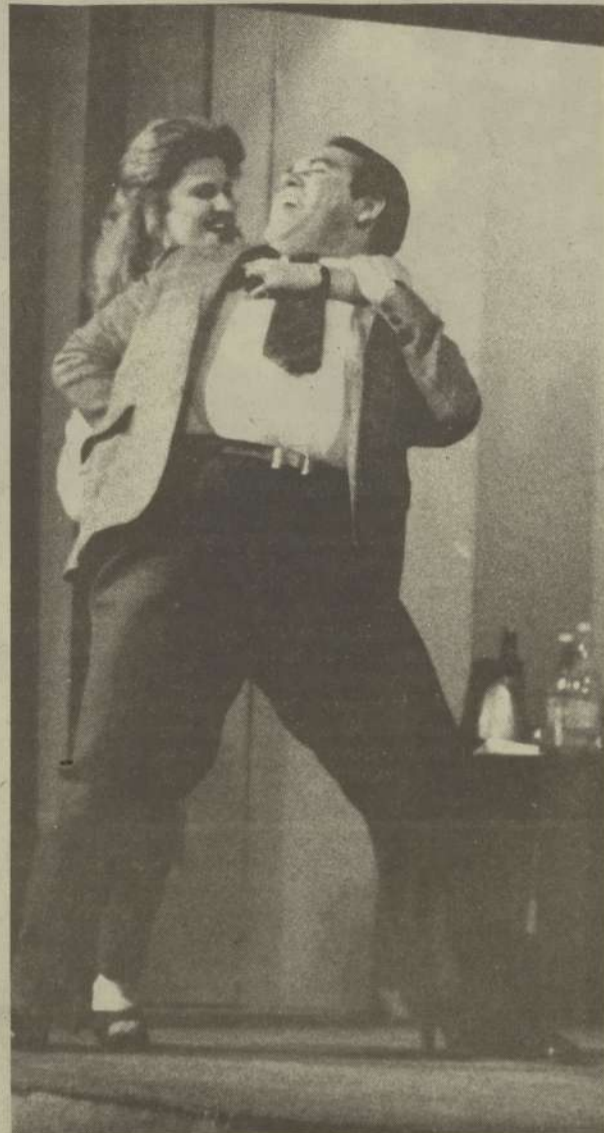
Among the family there are no static characters in this play. Each is touched by the little murders happening around them. The mother, played by Lynn Meyers is near hysteria throughout the story, but finds happiness in the most perverse manner which is the final ironic twist of the play.

Something should be said for a very captivating performance by an actor with a small part. Neil Hass, who plays the judge, a friend of the Newquist family who is picked to marry the young couple, comes across powerfully with his "What, no God in the ceremony!" speech to them. Usually a small part like his will not have a great impact on either the story or the audience, but the judge symbolizes the story's theme of traditional values being shelved and Hass was very convincing.

Near the play's end the action takes a severe downturn but is resurrected by an unexpected twist. This final scene is guaranteed to catch the audience offguard.

"Murders" is not a great script to begin with, but in this case the cast pulled it off well enough to make it worth seeing.

"Little Murders" was performed May 19, 20, and 21 and will be shown again this Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m. and Sunday at 2:30 p.m. in the McLoughlin theater.



Patsy (Amy DeVour) and Carol (Roy Osbourne) wrestle to prove who is strongest.

Photos by Brett Bigham



Patsy (Amy DeVour) and Carol (Roy Osbourne) watch on as Kenny (David Harvey) Marjorie (Lynn Meyers) and Alfred

(Sean Carlson) entertain on the couch in Clackamas Community College's production of Jules Feiffer's "Little Murders." The

show will run this Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m. and Sunday at 2:30 p.m. in the McLoughlin Theater.

