

Nelson & Vandivort make great comic team in *Bedroom Farce* at Theatre Three

Review by Martha Heimberg

What a delight to see Connie Nelson, a favorite Theatre Three actress and singer for many seasons, back in town to appear in Alan Ayckbourn's comedy *Bedroom Farce*, onstage through March 28th. And she's partnered in the play with the always resourceful comic actor Terry Vandivort, a longtime Theatre Three mainstay. Director Jac Alder, who keeps things moving at a properly brisk pace, gives this terrific comic team plenty of range for both physical gesture and inflection – and they deliver the chuckles all evening.

Ayckbourn, the prolific British playwright who's written 70 plays in his long and award-filled career, definitely has farce down pat. But that's not to say his dialogue and plots are ever forced or stale. This classic bit of whimsy features four couples moving in and out of Jeffrey Schmidt's inventive set of three open bedrooms in three different domiciles, arranged stair-step style from high in one corner to ground level at the other. Of course, a great deal of hilarious misunderstanding ensues in the course of one evening that starts with a party – and ends with some strange bedfellows, indeed!

Nelson and Vandivort, both pencil thin and exhibiting excellent British accents as the middle-aged couple, launch the evening off at the top of the stage in their posh bedroom as they dress for an anniversary dinner at a favorite restaurant. Delia (Nelson) is fussing with her makeup at the vanity, and Ernest (Vandivort) is trying to decide if his shoes need more polish. As she puts on her fancy evening dress, Delia worries about their son Trevor (*B.J. Cleveland*) and his collapsing marriage to the impossible Susannah (*Jody Rudman*), a fretful young woman he married when he broke up with the much cheerier Jan (Ginger Goldman), who subsequently married Nick (*Linus Craig*).

As Ernest and Delia flit off to their evening out, the scene shifts to the bedroom of Malcolm (*Jason Kennedy*) and Kate (*Tiffany Lonsdale-Hands*), an obviously playful and loving couple getting ready for a housewarming party for their new place. Trevor and Susannah arrive separately and Trevor tromps into the bedroom to deposit his coat, where poor Kate has jumped under the covers to hide her state of undress. Trevor is a great self-involved boor, of course, and never even seems to notice that he's trapped the poor hostess in her own bed. Throughout the evening Cleveland does a first-rate job of revealing the spoiled Trevor as a hapless loser, stumbling from one goofy mishap to another. Men think he's a jerk, but Trevor relies on the sympathy of women who apparently feel sorry for a guy this far out of it!

Blonde and buxom Jan has come to the party alone, because Nick is flat out on his bed with a wrenched back. As soon as she puts her sequined jacket on the bed, Trevor starts telling his old flame his marital troubles, and ends up embracing her just as the thin and miserably (and comically!) insecure wife Susannah walks in the room.

One misunderstanding leads to another – and soon we find Trevor whining to Kate that he has no place to go home to – and begging to stay there. Susannah rings up Trevor's

parents in her wretchedness, and crawls in bed with poor Delia – who must roll Ernest out into another room! My favorite scenes in the play are the exchanges between Nelson and Vandivort as they climb up the three bed-steps into their mountainous four-poster! Neither misses a line or wrinkle in this rollicking mattress !

Before the night is out, the unhappy pair has sufficiently spread their grief around to create domestic trouble for three other couples. Only a preposterously sentimental – and funny – last scene can bring together a happy resolution to this merry farce.

Bedroom Farce runs Thursdays through Sundays through March 28 at Theatre Three, 2800 Routh Street in the Quadrangle. Tickets are \$10 to \$40; for reservations, call 214-871-3300 or check www.theatre3dallas.com