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Theater Review: 'Don't Dress for Dinner' laugh-out-loud funny

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By LAWSON TAITTE / The Dallas Morning News

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If you want subtlety, depth and a dose of high culture, don't go to *Don't Dress for Dinner*. If you want to laugh out loud, repeatedly, do, do, do.

Theatre Three opened a new production of Marc Camoletti's farce (adapted by Robin Hawdon) on Monday. John McLean, a Dallasite who moved to Paris decades ago, returned from France to direct it.

Camoletti's script is of the mid-20th-century generic ilk lampooned in *Noises Off's* play-within-a-play, *Nothing On*: An improbable assortment of random lovers finds itself cooped up in a house with lots of doors leading in all directions.

In *Don't Dress for Dinner*, Bernard (Daylon Walton) is trying to hurry off his wife, Jacqueline (Jody Rudman), on a weekend's visit with her mother. He's eager to entertain his mistress, Suzanne (Tricia Ponsford), in a cozy weekend of his own. But Bernard's best friend, Robert (Ashley Wood), is also expected; when Jacqueline gets wind of this, she contrives to stay home because (unknown to Bernard, of course) she and Robert are lovers.

Bernard has hired a caterer, Suzette (Kimberly Condict), whose name is conveniently close enough to Suzanne's to provide some plot twists. Eventually Suzette's macho husband, George (J. Rod Pennek), shows up to help cut through all the knots of mistaken identities and dirty little secrets.

If no one's going to accuse *Don't Dress for Dinner* of being great art, nobody's going to begrudge us all a bit of mindless amusement in the current national malaise. The performers play up every joke as if they were auditioning for the role of fifth Marx Brother or fourth Stooge. Fortunately, they don't overplay them ... although it's hard to imagine how that might be possible.

Wood, always good at going for the big emotion, goes all out as the exasperated Robert. Displaying an unsuspected talent for broad physical comedy, he has such dazzling and refined comic technique he transmutes dross into platinum. Condict, equally bold, isn't quite as deft, but is hilarious anyway.

Of course, sex farces are supposed to be sexy. This one manages the trick, especially in the second act, as the actors undress for bed and are quite *en dishabille*. Costume designer Bruce R. Coleman puts them in dark red and salmon silk nightclothes, nicely set off by the country French gaudiness of Jac Alder and David Walsh's set.

Through March 8 at Theatre Three in the Quadrangle. Runs 130 mins. \$10 to \$40. 214-871-3300,

www.theatre3dallas.com.