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Two plays in one at Theatre Three

By MARK LOWRY

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DALLAS — Theatre Three is the first North Texas theater to stage Alan Ayckbourn's companion plays *House* and *Garden*. Here's how they work out:

The buzz: The two plays were written to be performed simultaneously in adjacent spaces, using the same cast, with actors going back and forth between the theaters. *House* is performed upstairs on the main stage, *Garden* downstairs in the much smaller Theatre Too space.

The idea is that once you see one of the plays, seeing the other will unlock some of the first's mysteries and will make you marvel at the playwright's — and the ensemble's — impeccable timing.

The plots: Altogether, it's about five relationships whose unhappy ends happen during an annual festival at the estate of Teddy (J. Brent Alford) and Trish Platt (Kerry Cole), outside London.

House, which happens inside, focuses on Trish, who comically ignores her philandering husband. *Garden* focuses on one of his dalliances, with neighbor Joanna Mace (Marisa Diotalevi), who goes crazy when Teddy breaks it off. Joanna's husband, Giles (Greg Forshay), is the nice guy caught off-guard.

We also get subplots about the Platts' politically minded daughter, the man who loves her and the estate's help. For fun, throw in a smug novelist (Regan Adair) and a drunken French actress (Emily Gray).

Does it work?: If you see both plays, yes. Although they are entertaining separately, neither holds up as well as a solo entity. If you can only see one, make it *House*, which has more fleshed-out characters. Directed by Bruce Coleman, it is an admirable undertaking. In satellite roles, British accents are all over the place. But Cole, Adair and Alford all handle it solidly and amaze with their character portrayals.

House and Garden Through Aug. 10

7:30 p.m. Thursdays; 8 p.m. Fridays; 2 and 8 p.m. Saturdays; 2:30 and 7:30 p.m. Sundays

Theatre Three, 2800 Routh St., Dallas

\$10-\$40 (\$10 discount if you purchase tickets for both plays at the same time)

214-871-3300; www.theatre3dallas.com

Be advised: Strong language

Runtime: Two-and-a-half hours, with one intermission (the plays are timed in sync)

Best reason to go: It's a gimmick, yes, but one that entertains.

Tip: You could see them in either order, but having seen *House* then *Garden* in Houston and *Garden* before *House* here, I recommend *House* first. It's a better play and will entice you into *Garden*.