



'Blithe Spirit' opens Friday

Joe Kirk and Sharon Hedden attempt to revive Madame Arcati (Betsy Andrade) as his first wife's spirit (Carol Maya) looks on. Scene is from Gilroy Community Theatre production of

"Blithe Spirit," playing at 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday at Gilroy High School theater. Production is also scheduled May 16 and 17. (Kai S. Lai photo)



BLITHE SPIRIT — Tickets are still available for the final performances of the Gilroy Community Theater production of Noel Coward's "Blithe Spirit" on Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m. in the Gilroy High School Theater. Following Saturday's performance, the Theater Angels Art League will host a champagne reception for the cast at 50 W. Fifth St. Tickets to the play directed by Jorge da

Costa, former producing director of the San Jose Civic Light Opera, will be available at the door or by calling 847-3099 or 847-3266. From left around the table at the seance scene are Sandra Rapazzini, Cal Schlesinger, Karen Thorsen, Sharon Hedden, Betsy Andrade and Joe Kirk. Carol Maya, at left, is the spirit.

'Blithe Spirit' offers top entertainment

By JOANNE RIFE
Special to The Dispatch

If a stage set sets the stage, so that an audience knows when the curtain goes up the quality of the production, then the Gilroy Community Theater's "Blithe Spirit" has got to be excellent community theater.

Ed Perkins should get a round of applause for set construction. There it is, as bold and sophisticated and witty as a Noel Coward comedy, appropriately enough.

The rest of the play almost comes up to that standard. Coward is known for his urbane, sophisticated, brittle and witty dialogue. But too much was lost, at least during dress rehearsal, particularly in the opening scenes. It was as though everyone was talking too fast; or was it the old bugaboo that goes with watching British films — it just takes awhile before you can understand the Queen's English? Anyway, this reviewer wanted to shout, "Slow down, you go too fast. Let's make the evening last."

The struggle to understand the dialogue came to an abrupt stop with the entrance of Madame Arcati, played by Betsy Andrade, who swooped aboard in an outlandish outfit and rescued the play. Twice during the play she made her exit to delighted applause from the singularly unsophisticated dress rehearsal night audience, and indeed, once she arrived the play picked up, everyone seemed to relax, and all's well that end's well.

laughs. Carol Maya as the ethereal Elvira made a fine blithe spirit. Her entrance, all white and wispy, was stunning. Sharon Heddon as Charles' second (and present) wife seemed a bit unsure and sped through her lines in what appeared to be hope they would be over more rapidly that way. She brings to mind the second wife in Daphne DuMaurier's "Rebecca." Maybe second wives have wide-eyed insecurity. Still Heddon was adequate in the role, as was Karen Thorsen in her part as Edith the maid and Cal Schlesinger as Dr. Bradman.

The play concerns the ghostly doings of at least two spirits who are visible to some and not to others. That leads to some nice dialogue between those who can and those who cannot, and do not know they cannot. The play is now 40 years old. Many comedies die in that period, but "Blithe Spirit" does not. I have a feeling it will be one of those old warhorses that will go on forever. The dialogue, in an odd way, reminds me of the brittle talk of Woody Allen's "Manhattan," and that certainly is contemporary.

Jorge de Costa was the director, putting a sure hand on the proceedings. The play moved with pace and control. The bugs at the dress rehearsal were all the type that can be done in with a dose of Raid, and one must believe de Costa has a steady hand on the bug killer. Producer was Lynette Williams.

Again, the set by Perkins was absolutely fine. Set decorations were by Marie Perkins and Louise

Andrade played Madame Arcati with a broad, slapstick hand and it went over very well. No subtlety here.

I must make note of Joe Kirk as Charles, a part taken in the 1941 Broadway production Clifton Webb. Kirk was tebbly debonair, veddy precise, a perfect Noel Coward leading man. Sandra Rappazzini as the somewhat tipsy Mrs. Bradman, brought some Smith, and again should be complimented. The technical directors, those lovely people who were in charge of some ghostly goings-on and a wizzard of a finale were Ed and Marie Perkins.

To get down to brass tacks: "Blithe Spirit" is well done and worth one's while if one is in the mood for a good laugh. If you are looking for the end of the world, go see "Apocalypse Now." "Blithe Spirit" will indicate there is plenty of juice in the old earth yet, and life after death is not too shabby either. A little white, perhaps, but worth waiting for. It turns out to be lots of fun.

The production will continue next weekend, Friday and Saturday, May 16 and 17, at the Gilroy High School Theater, curtain at 8 p.m.