## ARANDAND

Phone: 905-845-3824 (ext. 5559) Fax: 905-337-5567 e-mail: rjerred@haltonsearch.com

### There's nothing 'odd' about the success of this play

By Craig MacBride

SPECIAL TO THE BEAVER

Tomorrow will be a milestone in the history of theatre in Oakville. As the curtain rises on the West End Studio Theatre (WEST) production of Neil Simon's The Odd Couple (Female Version), it will mark the official start to the 25th season of the Oakville Drama Series.

Granted, 25 years is not a long time, but for members of ODS, it is a suitable occasion to acknowledge their accomplishments and to look toward what they can accomplish in the future.

It is a time for them to pat themselves on the back, and be patted on the back by their patrons, for not only staying together this long, but for growing in the manner that they have. The ODS has a strong trio of theatre groups that are simultaneously competing against one another and supporting one another. At this significant juncture, they continue to grow, and the quality of the work. along with their reputation, improves with each production.

When the person who has my job in 75 years sits down to sift through the history of the ODS for an article celebrating its 100th anniversary, I suspect that person will find the quarter century mark is where the group began to truly lift itself to the next level.

With all that on their minds, it is amazing that the cast and crew of The Odd Couple aren't more nervous than

"There's always pressure," said Yo Mustafa, artistic director of WEST and director of this production.

Of directing the first show of the season, he added, "you're setting the tone for the season, and we'll be setting the bar high."

The female version of The Odd Couple is not, as many think, women reading the original play, which was written for male characters. The female version is actually a different script entirely, albeit a near-duplicate plot. The female version, also written by Neil Simon, was first produced in 1986,

A Neil Simon favourite marks the official start to the 25th season of the Oakville Drama Series



Chantal Ayotte · Special to the Oakville Beaver

The female version of the ever-popular Neil Simon play The Odd Couple starts tomorrow. The cast at rehearsals are, front from left, Nancy Wasilik Festarini (Sylvie), Jamie Cortese (Olive), Dina Giunta (Renee), Paula Gardin Judge (Mickey) Heather Hunter (Vera). In back are, from left, Pamela Keyes (Florence), David Stewart (Jesus) and Matthew Timperlay (Manolo).

nearly 20 years after the success of the the husband of their friend Florence, original The Odd Couple.

A group of five women, sitting around a dining room table playing Trivial Pursuit, opens the play. The women quickly identify what stereotypes they are conveying, in mannerisms and dialogue, but what is novel about these stereotypes is how quickly, beneath the façade of personality, their impulses as humans bring them to similar actions and reactions.

This is brought to light early, when the women receive a phone call from

who has not yet arrived at their gettogether. The husband, Sidney, fears the worst after her abrupt disappearance, which followed his announcement that he wants out of their 14 years of mar-

Not long after, Florence arrives at Olive's apartment rattled, though not as rattled as her friends; they expect the worst. When Florence goes to the window of the apartment, her friends think she's going to jump out. When she goes to the washroom, they think she's going

to slit her wrists.

Eventually, Florence assures her friends that she doesn't plan on committing suicide and the friends leave. only Florence and Olive remaining.

It is apparent early, before even Florence's arrival, that the two women are opposites. Florence loves shopping, dressing, cleaning. Olive, on the other hand, favours sports, her Yankees baseball cap and anything but cleaning.

As she says in the play, "when you're dead, they're gonna throw dirt on you anyway."

The tension that results from the two women sharing the apartment leads to the gut of the play, the actors relying on one another to keep the timing precise. As for the characters they play, the two cantankerous women tear at their relationship only to find that it is stronger than they had thought.

"It's about friendship," Mustafa said. "I've done this play before, and I loved it. It's one of those plays the Oakville audience will enjoy."

It's not hard to imagine the audience enjoying the play, if the attitudes of the two leads are anything to go on. Jamie Cortese, who plays Olive, and Pamela Keyes, Florence, have been enjoying the chance to play these characters that represent the extremes in everyone.

They have also been pleased to work with Mustafa on this play.

"The dialogue's very well-written," Keyes said. "It's easy dialogue to play, and it's a little off the wall."

Cortese was more impressed by Mustafa's work than the work of the playwright. A relative newcomer to theatre, she said, "I have never been directed before until I met Yo. He almost makes me feel like I can act."

Watching the rehearsal, Mustafa has worked some sort of magic to make everyone else also believe that Cortese can act. Mustafa's talents have never been questioned though. His production of Fiddler on the Roof last season picked up several ODS awards at their annual awards night recently.

If this production goes as well as Mustafa is confident it will, he may be adding to his collection of accolades by this time next year.

Having only been a part of the ODS for five years, WEST is the youngest of the three groups, and it has a strong, large foundation to build on. It is fitting that they are starting off a promising season of theatre, one that appears to be shaping into a lift-off point for the ODS.

The Odd Couple (Female Version) will be on the stage at the Oakville Centre for the Performing Arts Sept. 11 -13 and 17-20. Single tickets cost \$18 and can be purchased at the OCPA box office or by calling 905-815-2021.



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