Neil Simon is the Holiday Inn o dinner theatre. Audiences wary of surprises know they'll get their money's worth from his witty one-liners and likeable characters.

And so we've had a rash of Simon in recent months. Deer Park Inn's current production of his proven crowd-pleaser, The Odd Couple, is the fourth of his popular comedies to be staged friends of long standing, as locally since January.

as Deer Park's admirable Last of the Red Hot Lovers a couple of cyears ago, it's the best of the re-

cent crop. -: Direction here is by the sure and creditable New York apartsand deft hand of Teri Hallatt. And ment. The contrast between this Odd Couple is firmly an- Oscar's mess and the spick-andchored in the experienced profes- span results of Felix's ministrasionalism of Paul Saunders and Stephen Day.

Simon's speech rhythms and tim- second acts together without an eing, is not quite at his best here as intermission. Oscar Madison, his second best is still funny and assured.

But he seems to have final act, is too dainty for Oscar edeveloped an unfortunate mannerism of late (perhaps a carry- ing over glass-rings and coasters over from his concurrent role in in act two. Murder at the Howard : Johnson's) - tagging some of his after seeing it again postlines with a nerdish laugh.

-- This tendency, noticeable in on the novelty of the situation for the poker-playing scenes, mercifully disappears in his scenes with Day, where the two play off each other with well-timed in much of his other work. panache.

Day neatly overcomes the handicap of his striking physical difference from the two actors indelibly identified with the role of Felix Unger.

Randall are short, dark, natty lovable and funny as they ever and finicky, Day is tall, blond, curly-haired and boyishly, athletically handsome. But Tony and Jack are soon forgotten as the appealing Day puts his own

stamp on Felix. __Little wire-framed glasses, a hurt; bewildered look and a laudable economy of fussiness give us a believable and likeable portrait of a fusspot who drives everyone crazy by annoying habits he knows he has but can't

control. Roxanne, McKenzie, and Lee Clements also put in good work as the twittering Pigeon sisters. These roles can so easily slip into caricature, but McKenzie and Clements are as real and convincing as they are amusing.

Their giggles never irritate and the easily convey the harmony of thought and long familiarity that mark the pair. They are perhaps not as lively as they might be, but this is probably part and parcel of performing only twice a week.

In this production, the players must work to the unfortunate schedule of a Wednesday thatinee and a Sunday evening performance. (Ronnie Hawkins bolds forth on Friday and Saturay at Deer Park).

With the time gap between performances, smooth pacing and ensemble playing are bound to suffer - at least in the early days of the run. While old pros like Saunders and Day and the talented McKenzie and Clements Cope very well in these circumstances, it puts a strain on the less-experienced actors who make up the quartet of Oscar's poker playing buddies.

Robbie Rox as Murray the cop, Fernando Curcione as Vinnie, Jason Stowe as Speed and John Lewis as Roy the accountant, have all sketched out individual characters for themselves.

But they have yet to effect the ensemble playing that establishes the foursome as



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THEATRE IN REVIEW

> Elizabeth Wyatt

familiar and at ease with each And, if it's not quite as polished other as the back of their hands - marked or otherwise.

Hallatt's set, with its navy walls and cityscapes backing the windows, makes an attractive tions is not as striking as it might be, but this is no doubt at-If Saunders, a master of tributable to running the first and

> And the floral table cloth, while it would make a nice touch for the on his own and belies Felix's fuss-

> The Odd Couple, one discovers television-series, relies heavily its humor. Simon's one-liners, at least in the beginning, don't come quite as thick and fast as they do

And after long exposure on TV, the situation is, of course, as familiar as one's own. Nevertheless, it holds up surprisingly well and entertainingly today. Oscar and Felix, as interpreted Where Jack Lemmon and Tony by Saunders and Day, are as



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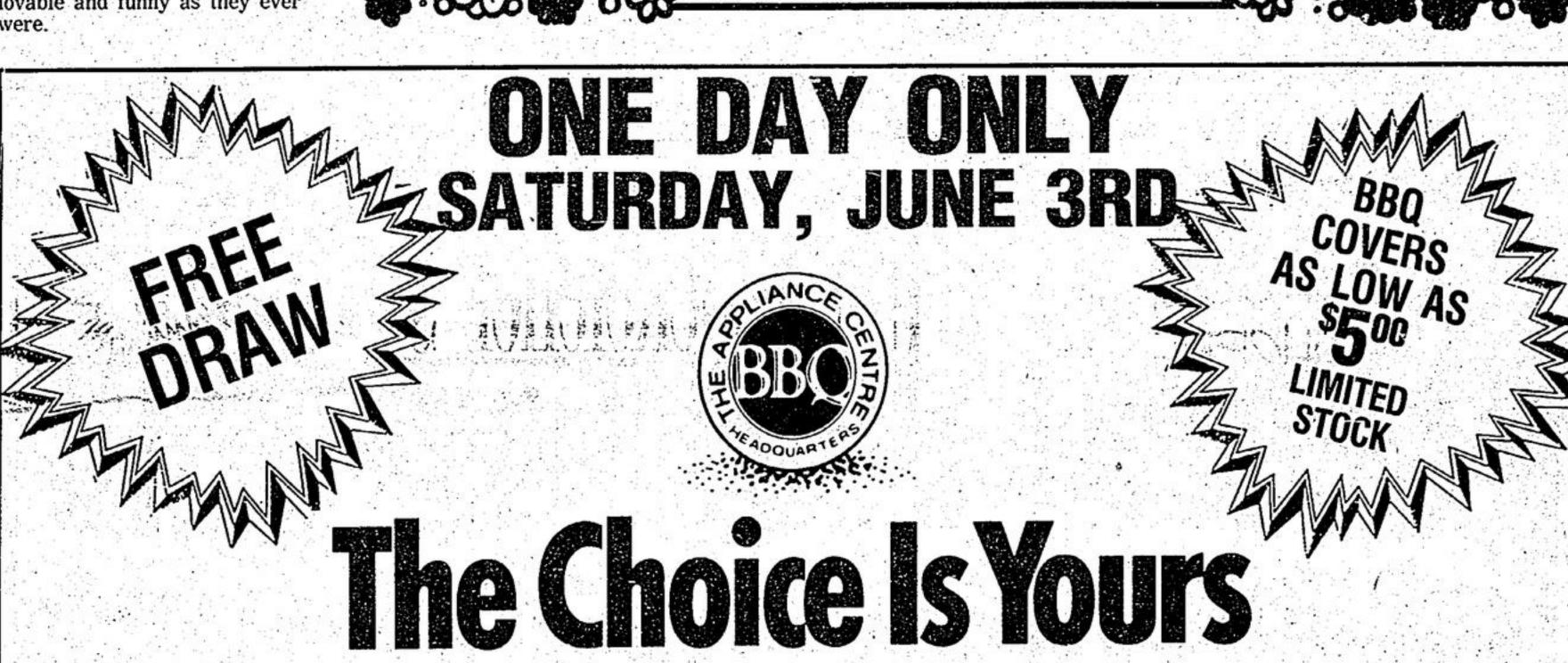
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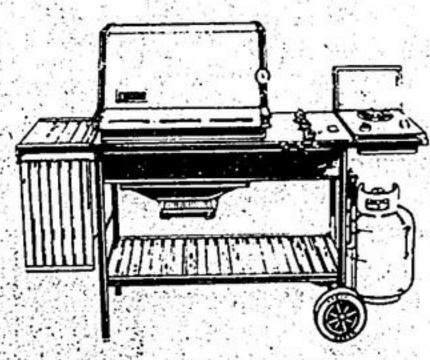
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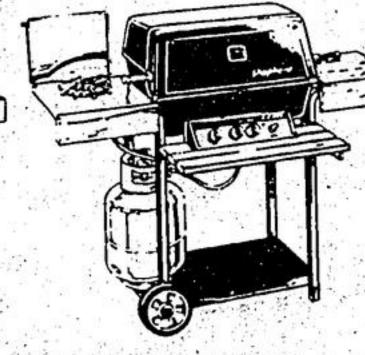


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