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### ASF Graduate Company's 'Stoops' soars

Montgomery Advertiser - Montgomery, Ala.

Subjects: Festivals; Theater

Author: Swafford, Allan

Date: Oct 14, 2000

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#### Document Text

The Graduate Company, the second-year, master-of-fine-arts students at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, blasted off its first show of the season with a vivacious production of Oliver Goldsmith's "She Stoops to Conquer." Far from stooping, the spirited cast soars in response to the imaginative direction of Sabin Epstein.

Under Epstein's guidance, Goldsmith's once revolutionary comedy regains a fresh luster. Epstein is particularly adept at creating an eye-pleasing mise en scene and lively, pertinent action that blows the dust off this lovely old comedy.

"She Stoops" unveils the romances of two young couples. The neurotically shy Marlow and Kate -- the "she" who does the stooping -- meet for the first time as the play begins, while the affair of Hastings and Constance has advanced to the point that they've planned to elope.

The progress of both romances is impeded by a slyly

mischievous, practical joke perpetrated by Kate's

half-brother Tony, a joke and a jokester that are the

driving forces at the center of this convoluted plot.

While part of the evergreen pleasure of this comedy is

watching the care with which Goldsmith constructed and

unfolded it, a still greater part is meeting these marvelous characters. In his hands characters that could easily be stock types for comedy -- a garrulous old man, a country bumpkin, etc.-- are fleshed into life and become breathing individuals, lovable in all their foibles.

The Graduate Company assumed these roles and make the

characters their own. Jenny Wales sparkles with an ironic

archness as Kate in revealing contrast to Mendy Garcia's

softer, though more worldly Constance. Wales's Kate

makes one want to rename this play "The Taming of the Wimp." Michael Reilly's suavely ardent Hastings opposite

Scot Mann's sometimes imperious, sometimes gauche

Marlow is also a rewarding combination. Robert Barry

Fleming's Mr. Hardcastle manages to be both raucously

funny and endearing. Devin Haqq compellingly explores

the surprising complications of Tony's character and leaves

us loving the insouciant sinner.

A bit of inspired casting, probably borne of desperation,

becomes a real coup in the production. Chris Ensweiler's

Mrs. Hardcastle is imaginatively conceived and, moreover, is a comic vision. With never a hint of drag-show tackiness, he creates a very real, vain but warm Dorothy.

Will Turbyne has given the production a versatile, visually appealing set, primarily a less than fashionable, old mansion, on which Danny Davidson's rich costumes glow like jewels.

WANT TO GO?

What: "She Stoops to Conquer"

by the Graduate Company of the Alabama Shakespeare Festival

When: Runs through Oct. 22; show times are 7:30 p.m.

Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday; 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday; 2 p.m. Saturday and Sunday

Where: Octagon at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Blount Cultural Park

Cost: Tickets range from \$12-\$15, and seating is reserved

Information: 271-5353

Allan Swafford has reviewed local theater for more than

15 years

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**Abstract** (Document Summary)

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