

Montgomery Advertiser

# Lifestyle



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June 6, 1999

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## ASF's 'Sockdology' delivers knockout entertainment

By Allan Swafford  
Special to the Advertiser

In 1905, Edward VII elevated the actor Henry Irving to the English knighthood. Irving's knighting, the first ever for an actor, signaled a profound change in their social condition.

Forty years before Edward's audacious action, in a Washington that had just triumphantly concluded a civil war, an actor assassinated the American president in Ford's Theater. That theater and the investigation of that crime are the place and plot of Jeffrey Hatcher's entertaining "Sockdology," which opened Friday at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival. The play conveys a time and situation that unleashed a

time of rabid animosity toward actors.

And while the investigation is what we watch, the play's binding theme is the actor as outcast who finds his "family" in the theater.

We perceive the actor's status through Secretary of War Edwin Stanton's contemptuous treatment of the cast of "Our American Cousin." That tragic night this popular, melodramatic comedy starred Laura Keene. The driven Stanton attempts to blame some — any — member of the cast for collusion with John Wilkes Booth, the assassin and the youngest scion of an acting dynasty.

If this precis sounds to you like the stuff of tragedy,

### REVIEW

think again. "Sockdology" is not merely a witty comedy, it is often a boisterous comedy. But like "Our American Cousin," it is comedy strongly tinged with, if not tragedy, then melodrama.

Driven by various, disparate motives, these actors refuse to betray Booth, who, after all, is one of their "family." We watch their sparring with an almost maddened Stanton, who knows he is the victim of lies. "Your profession makes deception an art unto itself," he screams at them, not even noticing that he is stating the blatantly obvious.

Seamlessly directed by Terence Lamude and headed by Philip Pleasants' complex Stanton and Greta Lambert's scintillant Keene, a stellar

cast brings the "Cousin" cast to spectacular life.

Sonja Lanzener is a case-hardened old actress. Sam Gregory's Mathews is a villain onstage and off. Rodney Clark's Hawk is a man haunted by his own sexual secrets. Traber Burns blusters as Ford, the theater owner. Noel Velez delights as a stable boy in a twelve-line role.

Richard Isackes continues a series of winning sets with his design that must show both the stage and backstage sides of Ford's Theatre — an elegant neoclassical interior out front, typically ratty behind. Kristine Kearney's costumes are level period pieces.

Allan Swafford has reviewed local theater for more than 15 years

### WANT TO GO?



Special to the Advertiser

Greta Lambert and Rodney Clark star in the ASF production, 'Sockdology.'

What: "Sockdology" by Jeffrey Hatcher

When: 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. today, 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. Sunday, 7:30 p.m. Friday, 8 p.m. June 18, 8 p.m. June 19, 7:30 p.m. June 23, 2 p.m. June 26, 2 p.m. June 27, 8 p.m. July 2, 8 p.m. July 3, 7:30 p.m. July 8, 8 p.m. July 9, 2 p.m. July 10, 2 p.m. July 11, 2 p.m. July 16, 2 p.m. July 18, 7:30 p.m. July 22, 2 p.m. July 24

Where: Alabama Shakespeare Festival

Admission: Tickets are \$20-\$23 through June 14, \$21-\$24 through July 4 and \$22-\$25 through July 24; discounts for military, senior citizens and groups  
Information: 271-5353