

# Lifestyle



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March 6, 1999

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REVIEW

## Stellar cast carries ASF's 'When We Are Married'

By Allan Swafford  
Special to the Advertiser

In the Alabama Shakespeare Festival's just-opened production of J. B. Priestley's "When We Are Married," the cast and director provide so glistening a surface that we are blinded to extraneous scenes, characters and plot threads. Hovering at the verge of farce, the play generates overlapping waves of laughter. The crowd is definitely pleased.

Met at the Helliwells to celebrate the 25th anniversary of their joint marriage, three couples learn that their nuptial pastor was unqualified to marry them as he had failed to fill out the proper bureaucratic paperwork. A young man, the church organist and unwelcome suitor of one couple's niece, reveals the situation, which he has discovered quite by accident.

Surrounding the couples we have a menagerie of eccentric servants, newspaper types, one lady of sickly-if-not-ill! reputation and a passing cleric who's heard on the street they may need a minister in the house.

The situation is worked out with a great deal of fun in the process. But the resolution is almost embarrassingly contrived and narrowly avoids a completely unexpected, maudlin sententiousness. And much of the fun occurs in the scenes which seem to be padding. The young lovers, for instance, are purely decoration tied tenuously to the plot by giving the young man the function of revealing the flawed marriages, a function that could easily have been assumed by one of several other characters.

But what happens on stage, on Doug Huszti's gorgeous set, is theater magic. Barry Boys masterfully directs a flawless cast to a genuine triumph. The cast's perfection is obvious from the play's opening, with Sarah Flanagan's entrance as the maid, Ruby, with Brian Kurlander as an ideal young lover. The laughter begins immediately

## Married: Cast makes most of play

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and continues as the couples — the Helliwells (nervous Greta Lambert with the bullying Traber Burns), the Parkers (cool Rochelle Hogue with a pompous Phillip Pleasants) and the Soppitts (dominant Jill Tanner with a henpecked Paul Hebron) — start to question whether, indeed, they want to be married.

Aside from the central six, the production features magnificently comic turns by several others. Sonia Lanzener delights as the char, Mrs. Northrop, who discovers the couples' terrible secret and gleefully sets out to reveal it. John Woodson's drunken Ormoroed, who himself bears a secret burden, is raucously funny, as is Monica Bell's shady Lottie Grady. This is a cast that casts a spell over its audience.

### WANT TO GO?

- **What:** J.B. Priestley's "When We Are Married"
- **When:** preview performances are 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday; the premiere is 8 p.m. Friday; other showings are 2 and 8 p.m. Saturday; 2 and 7:30 p.m. Sunday; 7:30 p.m. March 11, 8 p.m. March 12, 2 and 8 p.m. March 13, 2 p.m. March 14, 7:30 p.m. April 8, 2 and 8 p.m. April 10, 2 p.m. April 11, 8 p.m. April 16, 2 p.m. April 17, 8 p.m. April 23 and 30, 8 p.m. May 1 and 2, 2 p.m. May 7 and 8, 7:30 p.m. May 12 and 13, 8 p.m. May 14, 2 p.m. May 15, 7:30 p.m. June 9 and 17, 2 p.m. June 18, 2 p.m. June 25, 8 p.m. June 26, 7:30 p.m. July 1, 8 p.m. July 10, 7:30 p.m. July 15, 2 p.m. July 17, 7:30 p.m. July 21, 8 p.m. July 23, 2 p.m. July 25
- **Where:** Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Blount Cultural Park
- **Admission:** previews are \$20, regular shows range between \$22 and 29
- **Information:** (800) 841-4273