

Lifestyle



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'The Rehearsal' a must for theater lovers

By Allan Swafford
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REVIEW

Jean Anouilh's genius nowhere shines more brilliantly than in his dark comedy, "The Rehearsal," running at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, in an adroitly directed production rich in memorable performances. For the local theatergoer this one is a *must see*.

Anouilh adeptly wove an 18th century masterpiece, Marivaux's "The Double Inconstancy," into his 20th century masterpiece. The Marivaux play shares themes and situations with Anouilh's in ways that mutually comments on the two.

To a chateau in the 1950s, the count and countess invite a group of close friends to rehearse "The Double Inconstancy" in preparation for an

upcoming ball. Their utterly selfish lives, spent entirely in search of pleasure, are parallel with the Marivaux characters, including the planned seduction of a beautiful, young woman perceived as their inferior.

This group of friends, so-called, includes the mistress of the count, the lover of the countess, the count's best friend and the godfather of the young woman, a godfather with designs on his goddaughter. The count and countess are involved in a loveless marriage of convenience.

We watch the terror of this caste as it is challenged by real love — the count for the first time in his life really

falls in love and does so with his social inferior — its triumph by desperate means and the destructive effects this desperate triumph has on its members.

And all of this, even at its darkest moment, has a surface that glitters with wit that immediately recalls Oscar Wilde.

Barry Boys directs this comedy with admirable verve, and his cast rises to the high standards he sets them. As the count, called Tiger, Eric Sheffer Stevens gives a wry, dry spin to his role which italicizes his moments of warmth. Jenny Sheffer Stevens' countess radiates a chilly haughtiness with flashes of fury at what she sees as her husband's indiscretion. Regan Thompson's Hortensia, the count's upper-

class mistress, vibrates with vivacity.

Charlton David James' godfather, Damiens, is middle-class servility but with a smoldering resentment at the treatment of Lucile. Sheffield Chastain's Villebosse, the countess' lover, is a parody of hot-blooded Latinity. Tracy Liz Miller's virginal Lucile is composed of equal parts steel and idealism. John Nagle's Hero, the count's drunken, dying friend, is the most versatile performance in a production rich in versatility.

Charles Caldwell's scenic design, a study of opulence in black and white, beautifully externalizes the ethical conflicts explored in the play.

Allan Swafford has reviewed local theater for more than 15 years

WANT TO GO?

- **What:** Jean Anouilh's "The Rehearsal," or "Love's Reward"
- **When:** 2 and 8 p.m. today, 2 p.m. Sunday, 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, 8 p.m. Friday, 2 and 8 p.m.
- **Where:** The Octagon Theatre at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, One Festival Drive.
- **Admission:** \$10 general admission and \$8 for groups of 10 or more
- **Information:** 271-5353 or (800) 841-4273; The ASF box office is open 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Monday through Saturday; noon-4 p.m. Sunday and until 9 p.m. on performance nights.