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Tuesday 18 February 1975

'Imaginary Invalid': A Classic

By WALTER LAZENBY

CHARLESTON — Once again a classic play has taken the stage at Eastern's Fine Arts Theatre. This one is a real romp, for the University players and audiences alike.

You will have three more chances to see it there this weekend, plus one chance at Lake Land College on Thursday evening.

The vehicle is "The Imaginary Invalid," a seventeenth-century play by France's greatest comic playwright, Moliere. It farcically treats of hypochondria and the medical quackery which parasitically feeds on it.

In a more romantic vein it deals with young lovers nearly thwarted in their courtship. Health and sanity prevail in their story, at least; but the

outlandish finale resembles something out of the best pages of "Mad" magazine.

The central character, Argan, knows that he is not ill but, desiring attention perhaps, has so long pretended to need constant medical care that evidently he now partially believes he does. His method of

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celebrating would be to drink a sal hepatica cocktail or a castor oil cordial.

Carrying his idee fixe to extreme absurdity, he determines that his daughter must marry a young doctor, the foolish son and nephew of doctors, to provide him with

readily available or cheap medical attendance.

This of course conflicts with the girl's wishes, for she has met a man who suits her better. Only the clever and reasonable maid, Toinette, can prevent the catastrophic mismating, by timely use of stratagem and some far-fetched deceptions to match her master's.

A high point of Act One is the scene in which a resourceful young man proves his mettle as a lover by inventing a way to propose to his beloved right under the nose of her unsuspecting father. It is well executed in performance by the principals, Randy Arney as Cleante and Patsy Hays as Angelique.

Delicious moments in Act Two involving dramatic irony top that, though. The invalid's scheming wife played by Cindy Russell, gets her comeupance when she utters some candid remarks at the side of what she thinks is a death-bed; and ironically the daughter and future son-in-law pronounce some not-so-candid comments in the same place, guaranteeing their happy future.

The mockery of initiation into the medical fraternity which brings down the final curtain contains the harshest satire against doctors in the whole script and, as Director Gerald Sullivan has instructed his performers to render it, echoes church ritual as well.

Gary Ambler immerses

himself totally in the demanding invalid's role. His constant byplay seems well-motivated, is sustained without unimaginative repetition, and fleshes out a type character. He displays considerable savoir-faire. His opening soliloquy seems a bit rushed, but the pace of most of Act One is perfect. In some of his exchanges with Toinette and Angelique it is breathtakingly brisk.

Jan Lamos presents a very likable Toinette with commendable aplomb and verve. She manages to make credible all the highly stylized movements that the director called for and makes some really quick changes of costume without seeming the least bit ruffled.

Teri McClure is a very fresh and convincing Louise; Phillip Wright gives a lively interpretation of the paradox of a doctor practically beating up his patient to get him to take medicine as prescribed.

Other details worth savoring are Randy Arney's ridiculous first entrance, the epic sound of the front doorbell, certain moments in Cindy Russell's performance, John Hightower's squinting and lip-moistening movements, and B. J. Heft's flamboyant costume. The colors in Phyllis Rogers's costumes nicely blend with those in Clarence Blanchette's attractive abstract set.

Voila an entertaining evening.