

# Noises Off draws big laughs despite breakneck pacing



Courtesy of Mainstage Theatre

Chaos erupts on the set of *Noises Off's* play-within-a-play as Frederick Fellowes (freshman Doug Perez) drops his pants. The uproarious farce, now playing on the Mainstage in the Scales Fine Arts Center, triumphs despite occasionally forced gags.

By CRAIG JOSEPH  
OLD GOLD AND BLACK REVIEWER

Doors slam, sardines fly, people fall and chaos reigns in the university theatre's season-opening production of *Noises Off*. But that's a good thing.

Written by British playwright Michael Frayn, *Noises Off* is a high-speed farce about life in the theater. Taking as its subject a dysfunctional group of actors trying to put on a classic sex farce titled *Nothing On*, the play chronicles the disintegration of the production as the company moves from dress rehearsal to performances months later. The cast members' trysts, grudges and nasty pranks begin to affect the performance, blurring the lines between real life and art.

Director Donald Wolfe, a professor and the chairman of the department of theatre arts, has done an excellent job selecting a group of students who work well together as an ensemble. This is well demonstrated in the second act, which is done entirely in pantomime as the *Nothing On* cast bickers backstage during a performance.

There is an evident team effort which makes the action move furiously, clarifying the ever-changing relationships of the crazy troupe. The scene entertains without leaving the audience in the dust of the quickly-moving romp.

The major problem with the production is perhaps that the ensemble aspect has been taken too far. At some clearly choreographed moments, the director has effectively chosen whom the audience should focus on, what humorous actions should occur and how other actions should fade into the background; these are the best moments in the show.

At other times, however, chaos reigns as cast members are doing their own bits, and it is difficult for the audience to focus on what the script emphasizes. Granted, this is part of the fun, but this production at times gives the impression of being a lot of funny moments connected by pace-slowness filler.

These occasional problems, however, do not diminish the delightful individual performances. Senior Mandy Lauffer is successful as Dotty Otley; her nervous attention to wig, dress, pearls and a certain young co-star belie the underlying fear of the fading actress that she may be losing her stuff.

In a very different turn, Lauffer confronts Dotty's role of the Cockney maid, Mrs. Clackett. Though her accent and limp tend to fade in and out, Lauffer's scatterbrained timing and delivery are perfect, most notably in her third-act breakdown.

Senior Lauren Kirby and sophomore Bo Perry are extremely effective as the emotionally unstable backstage workers. As assistant stage manager Poppy Norton-Taylor,

Kirby masters facial expressions of consternation, delight and despair which entertain throughout. Her hilarious non-directed "power walk" demonstrates Poppy's "lostness" in the theater world.

Perry's total physical control within the context of stage manager Tim Allgood's "out of control" insomnia is amazing; his pratfalls, quick dashing, and generally dazed dimness are about the best in the production.

As director Lloyd Dallas, junior Don Pocock starts off strong with a booming voice which surprises the audience, and a well-polished, smart delivery of Lloyd's sarcastic remarks to his imbecilic cast.

At the same time, both his frustration with and lecherous looks toward the women in his company are very believable.

He has a tendency, however, to become inconsistent as the pace picks up in later acts, glossing over some very funny and pointed insults and allowing Lloyd's rage to interfere with the audience's understanding of what he is saying.

Sophomore Dan Stern demonstrates his usual excellent comic timing as Selsdon Mowbray, the alcoholic actor portraying the burglar. Stern's drunken ramblings and "bad acting" are funny indeed; he has commendably created a memorable character.

However, a problem occurs in that his humor. See *Noises*, Page B6

# Ailing Secrest pianist replaced with two times the ivories

By SETH BRODSKY  
OLD GOLD AND BLACK REVIEWER

Raise your hands to the sky and shed a fulsome tear for Richard Goode. The renowned concert pianist has cancelled his performance as the first musical artist of the 1995-96 Secrest Artist Series. Let us weep.

Now that you have tasted that bitter pill, dry your tender reddened eyes and prepare for the fabulous Paratore Brothers.

Yes — the Secrest Series, confronted with seemingly an unsolvable problem, concertlessness,

has redeemed itself with not just one pianist but *two*.

The Paratores, once referred to as "two brothers, four hands," will give a two-piano recital in place of the sorely-missed Goode.

They will perform at 8:30 p.m. Friday in Wait Chapel, the time at which Goode was scheduled to play.

Goode, who is dealing with a bout of tendonitis in his forearms, was ordered by his doctor to cancel three weeks' worth of concert engagements.

It should also be noted that the panel discussion on Beethoven, to occur on Saturday morning as one of

several symposia for Parents' Weekend, and in which Goode was to participate, has also been cancelled.

But as the past is done with, we shall look only to the future and to the Paratores, who are highly esteemed artists in their own right.

Viewed as "one of today's foremost keyboard duos ... on one piano or two", the Paratores will perform a well-rounded program of famous and beloved works.

Friday night's program is sure to satiate any piano fan, including Schubert's Fantasy in F Minor, Op. 103, Mozart's Sonata in D Major, KV

448, Ravel's *Spanish Rhapsody* and Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*.

The Paratores have led an impressive concert career, having appeared with a great many orchestras, including the Berlin Philharmonic, the Chicago Symphony, the National Symphony, the Vienna Philharmonic and the New York Philharmonic.

In addition, they continue to give annual concert tours of Europe with various ensembles, the Dresden Philharmonic and the Prague Chamber Orchestra among them.

They are also regular guests at a number of famous music festivals

such as Lincoln Center's Mostly Mozart and the Lucerne Festival.

Supplementing the busy concert schedule, the Paratore Brothers have also made recordings for various major record labels, including CBS Masterworks and Koch International; three new CDs for Koch contain the music of Ravel, Stravinsky and Gershwin.

In all, not a bad resume. Those zealous Beethoven fanatics hankering after a hypertrophic invocation of the "Hammerklavier" Sonata will unfortunately have to settle for Goode's exquisite recording of the

work for now; but it is difficult to turn down any performance of *Rhapsody in Blue*, and for all those who love the piano, and admire impeccable technique and dazzling showmanship, the Paratore Brothers are sure to please.

Tickets previously purchased for Goode's concert will be honored for the Paratores' recital.

Tickets for students are free at the information desk in the Benson University Center. Tickets for parents of students will be sold at a discount price of \$7, and are free for children under twelve.

# Local band hits scene with Fugazi-like sound

By GRAY CRAWFORD  
PERSPECTIVES EDITOR

The headlining band at Friday night's WAKE Radio party, Jet Crown Dixie, is a strong addition to the Winston-Salem music scene. With a sound influenced by Washington, D.C. bands like the Boo Radleys and Girls Against Boys, Jet Crown Dixie's debut album *Exit* is now in stores on local label Huel Records.

Charles Scheer (guitar, vocals), Sean Cooney, '93, (bass, vocals) and Kevin Beroth (drums) make up Jet Crown Dixie. Scheer, who moved to Winston-Salem for graduate school after living in D.C. for eight years, hopes to help pioneer a local scene which will benefit university students to the extent the D.C. scene benefitted him.

"We all feel that, being in a college town

lot of students into that," Scheer continued. "I'd like to think that people can take refuge in our stuff, granted there isn't a lot of exciting local stuff to hear."

The Jet Crown Dixie history is a relatively short one. Ten Mic member Scheer knew Cooney (Plunger, Bile) and Beroth (Dead End Road) through their respective acts. Around November 1994 they began jamming and recording every idea on a four-track. They soon assembled a ten-song tape with a homemade cover and sold around forty copies.

Cooney and Scheer knew Harry Costner of Huel Records through teaching at Carver High School and playing in local bands. They petitioned him and Huel for a record deal.

"One of the best things about petitioning them is that we grew up a lot," Scheer said.

"We went to (Huel) with an idea for a CD, and by the time they really gave us a concrete answer we had evolved into a pretty serious band."

Cooney said that about two-thirds of the songs on the four-track tape are on the debut album. Beroth noted that most of the songs are now outdated.

"The songs on the CD remind me of one year ago, which is a long time for me; a lot has happened to us since then," Scheer said.

Cooney said they have a CD's worth of new songs. "A lot of it is more abstract; we're having to pull ourselves back from not getting too weird with our song structures," he said. "One good thing is that it's gotten more dynamic."

"You can say so much in quiet parts without

See *Dixie*, Page B6

# Partying trio celebrates white trash

By MICHAEL JANSSEN  
ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

Over the past decade, local swamp-rock heroes Southern Culture On the Skids have come a long way from their first gig, opening for a porno flick called *Café Flesh* — or have they?

Guitarist Rick Miller is unsure of their place in today's artistic spectrum. "Are (we) above pro wrestling?" he wondered in a soundcheck interview before their Friday night concert at Ziggy's. "Not really. Wrestling and monster movies are kind of on this lower plane, below what we might call art, and that's why we like it."

The Chapel Hill trio has carved out a niche by faithfully cranking out a patchwork blend of surf, blues, soul, classic rock and country, and spicing up the rootsy grooves with lyrics about life's hedonistic standbys: food, sex, cars and having a good time.

Without straying from these hallowed pillars of party music, the trio snagged themselves a major-label deal with DGC. Their latest album, *Dirt Track Date*, is appropriate for listening while driving around in a beat-up Caddy or slurping down greasy diner fare.

Surf-influenced songs such as "Skullbucket" and "Galley Slave" evoke '50s tunesmiths Link Wray and Dick Dale, whereas old-style country tracks like "Whole Lotta Things" and "Nitty Gritty" offer salvation to people trying to escape commercial country's sappy schmaltz.

Whether bluesy fuzztoned noise or lap steel numbers like "Make Mayan a Hawaiian," all the tunes communicate a coherent message.

"The message is 'party, man,'" Miller said. "Get laid if you can, have a good time. Forget your troubles. Come to one of our



Courtesy of DGC

Southern Culture On the Skids, from left to right: David Hartman (drums), Mary Huff (bass, vocals) and Rick Miller (guitar, vocals). The trio writes raucous songs which center around such topics as fried chicken and junk food.

shows, have some fun, dance."

Lest an unsure public hastily chalk SCOTS up as a talentless party band, or, even worse, a "joke band," their music resonates with gritty skill, mostly thanks to Miller's amazing talent at wringing reverb-drenched sounds from his trusty Danelectro guitars.

Their concert was a showcase for Miller's ability to blend virtuosic showmanship with Mary Huff's bluesy bass and drummer David Hartman's thumping, funky beats.

Miller said the trio gets its patchwork-

quilt songwriting sensibilities from growing up in the South in an era when commercial radio was not yet as stagnant as today's stately swill.

"When I was growing up, we had an AM station that was on a dirt road," he said. "You'd camp out in the backyard with your transistor radio, and they used to play everything. ... One minute you'd hear the Dave Clark Five, the next minute you'd hear Otis Redding, the next minute you'd See *SCOTS*, Page B6

# Animal Crackers celebrates Marxist theory (Groucho's, that is)

By EDDIE CHILDRESS  
CONTRIBUTING REVIEWER

Before Mel Brooks became a household name, before the makers of *Airplane* and *The Naked Gun* met, and before Jim Carrey was even a gleam in his father's eye, there were the Marx Brothers.

Stars of stage and screen, Groucho (the wiseguy with the glasses and the fake moustache), Chico (the one with the bad Italian accent), Harpo (the mute with the perm) and Zeppo (the one that isn't funny) can be beheld on video in all of their outrageous zaniness in the adaptation of their stage show *Animal Crackers*.

The plot is irrelevant. In fact, if

you're in a rush, you can fast-forward through all the parts that don't have one of the brothers in them (Zeppo doesn't count) and not miss anything important (i.e. funny).

But, for those who are interested in such things: Capt. Geoffrey T. Spaulding (Groucho), the famed African explorer, is to be the guest of honor at a party thrown by socialite Mrs. Rittenhouse (Margaret Dumont), with music by Emanuel Ravelli (Chico) and the



mysterious Professor (Harpo).

Also at this party, famous millionaire Roscoe W. Chandler (Louis Sorin) is to unveil Beaugard's painting *After the Hunt*. But the painting is exchanged by Arabella Rittenhouse (Lillian Roth) for a duplicate by her starving artist fiancée.

The duplicate is then exchanged for another copy by rival socialites seeking to sabotage what would be the social event of the season.

But this is first and foremost a Marx Brothers' vehicle. The plot provides a jumping-off point for a remarkable mix of witty wordplay, physical humor and good old-fashioned comic timing.

The most famous of the group, due

to his popular 1950s game show *You Bet Your Life*, is Groucho, who specializes in puns and insults.

His humor can get somewhat esoteric at times ("I should say you are intruding. I should say you are intruding; excuse me, I was using the subjunctive instead of the past tense."), but just the sight of shoe polish on his upper lip mimicking a moustache, particularly when coupled with some of his facial expressions, is funny in itself.

When it comes to really funny expressions, Harpo wins hands down. He never says a line, but he pulls off a highly comic performance just by virtue of the way he moves and the things he does — somewhat like Jim

Carrey, except the entire movie is not about Harpo. Also, he plays the harp, which is a treat in itself.

Chico also demonstrates a good deal of musical talent on his particular instrument of choice, the piano. His comedic contributions work in union with Groucho, Harpo or both at once.

None of them serves as the straight man; if straight lines aren't taken from other cast members, then a joke from one just sets up a joke from another.

And, of course there is Zeppo, the Latoya Jackson of the '40s. Though a good backup singer and an adequate actor, he would never have been famous if it wasn't for his last name.

In fact, yours truly has considered the theory that he was adopted, but

that proves implausible in the face of his physical resemblance. That nose could not have been a coincidence.

When someone mentions "classic comedy," the Marx Brothers are one of the first names to come to mind.

This video is an opportunity for the Gen X whippersnappers to see what inspired some of the stuff we laugh at today. Granted, some of the jokes are a bit dated; after all, the movie bears a 1940 copyright.

Others might seem old in a different sense, but you must remember that this was the original — or, at the very least, stolen from the original. There are enough good bits to go around, though. Look for it at Blockbuster or West End Video.