

goldfish publishers

Horn of Plenty

Mark S.P. Turvin
goldfishpublishers.com
mspt@goldfishpublishers.com

Come Blow Your Horn

by Neil Simon

Directed by Gary Caswell

[Hale Centre Theatre, Gilbert](#)

(480) 497-1181

December 29th, 2006 - February 10th, 2007

\$16.00 - \$18.00

The production currently running at **Hale Centre Theatre** disproves two theatrical edicts. First, many believe that the earliest of **Neil Simon** plays are too dated to work. I had neither seen nor read his first commercial hit *Come Blow Your Horn*, but I figured there must be a reason it hasn't seen the light of the night in the Valley in over ten seasons. Second, it's generally true that a director that casts himself is helmed by a fool. What the Hale's presentation proves is that while *Horn* is definitely dated, it is still full of Simon's vintage zingers and plot reversals and can be enjoyed for the Camelot 60s period piece that it is. Director/star **Gary Caswell**, a veteran of both gigs, is the exception that makes the second rule. He handles directing in the round well, keeping the show believably moving on its feet with a few nifty bits of blocking while never leaving the audience craning to see action, and he has cast himself in a role that is made for his comedic talents. Past these two obstacles, the rest of the ensemble and the designers help to turn this into a pretty enjoyable evening.

Caswell is playing Alan Baker, an over-30 salesman who works for his father (**Bob DePalma**) and with his repressed 21 year-old brother, Buddy (**Michael Sullivan**). Alan is playing the field, of whom we see two of his conquests: the perky blonde Peggy (**Karla Frederick**) on the prowl for an acting role and the good girl Connie (**Ashley Yazzie**) who is holding out for a ring. Alan convinces Buddy to move out of the house with his father and mother (**Barbara McGrath**) to become a swinger and enjoy his life. Typical Simonesque tangles ensue.

Alan is a role in Caswell's sweet spot. He does an excellent job of playing both ends of the character's arc while hitting all of the laugh lines. Ordinarily seen as the comedic best friend, he smoothly moves into a starring role with a mix of believability and bravado. Sullivan's initial presentation of Buddy rings of George McFly from the *Back to the Future* trilogy, though this isn't a bad choice. As he gets more frightened by his brother's machinations, he avoids shrillness by being lovably overwhelmed.

Frederick is cute as the predatory Peggy. She offers the requisite amount of cooing, huffing, and shimmying. Yazzie, whose period-though-unfortunate wig makes her look a little like a young Ruth Buzzi, is strong in presentation, though her vocal qualities are a little rushed.

DePalma takes on the father role with panache. He, too, has established himself portraying a certain kind of character, one similar to this, but he takes on this larger role and proves why he's got it down. McGrath had her line struggles the second Saturday, but shows her comedic prowess throughout and her scene involving missing pencils and a constantly ringing phone shows why she's one of the go-to-seasoned actresses in town.

The production values are moving ever higher for this company. **David** and **Corrin Dietlein's** set is overwhelming in period details and great playing spaces. David's lighting design fits the production's expectations, and **Sandy Bishop** and Corrin's costumes capture the period and character.

Hale has another fine comedy offering on display. I look forward to their upcoming production, the musical *The Scarlet Pimpernel* in the round.

-30-