

## Director Carleton brings Conquer to life

**COLCHESTER** — Last Tuesday night's opening of the third show at Saint Michael's Playhouse, Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops To Conquer* was — as the great Gilbert has said in his libretto for *The Mikado* — “modified rapture” or a reasonable facsimile thereof. The only things that took the edge off the acting at all was a small amount of uncertainty about lines, some very early and soon corrected problems for audibility from several of the cast members, and audience laughter at points where the company seemed not to expect them.

With Sarah Carlton as director, one has almost a preordained assurance that all will be well. With regard to the words, as I said, there needed just a bit more security. The physical comedy was marvelously invented and marvelously executed. The company — Equity or not — worked closely as unit, and everything we needed to know, we knew.

The company included local talent such as John D.

Alexander and Kathryn Blume, as well as marvelous other actors — especially Michael Mendelssohn as George Hastings and John Hayden as Charles Marlow and Mary Carol Maganzini as the second Mrs. Hardcastle — who brought the play grandly to life.

Sets by Laurencio Ruiz, costumes by Maggie Lee-Burdorf and the balance of the tech crew should've taken a bow, as should have dialect coach Peter Jack Tkatch. And using all of these to the optimum was director Carleton, who stooped to every imaginative device of line-reading and physical comedy to make Goldsmith's comedy come vividly to life.

### She said

Have you ever asked yourself, “She stoops to conquer what?, who?” Well, it became clear to me for the first time when I saw this version. The directing and acting were outstanding. Sometimes local accents can be hard to understand. Not so in this play.

The stage was set with a delightful fire in the fireplace of an “old rumbling mansion located in the English countryside.” The fire was created with, what I assume was some kind of lightweight paper or material, with a red light shining on it and a fan making the flames dance. I found myself drawn to it, it was well done. The same technique was used to light up the evening water fountain, but with a blue light to represent water flowing up. This also was well done. The rest

of the scenes were created by simple painted backdrops and some well placed dual purpose furniture.

The costumes were enchanting and authentic. Long bustled gowns for the ladies and long

waist coats for the gentlemen. The ladies wore bouffant powdered wigs or had their hair done up in styles of the day. The men had long pulled back hair or white powdered wigs. Mr. Hardcastle (John D. Alexander), during a frustrated moment with his best friend's son, soon to be son-in-law, Charles Marlow (John Hayden), lost his wig and yanked it back on completely off center. The audience roared.

Alexander did an outstanding job as Mr. Hardcastle, Kate's (Kathryn Blume) father. It took me a while to realize who he was. Blume was a wonderful Kate toying with Charles'



John Hayden, John D. Alexander, and Michael Mendelson in *She Stoops to Conquer* at St. Michael's Playhouse.

feelings. Hayden was spectacular in revealing his multi-personalities, from his tongue-tied conversation with the lady of the house, to his self-assurance

with the maid. George Hastings (Michael Mendelson) made a perfect buddy for Marlow. Mendelson's long legs made his trippings and short sprints across the stage extremely comical. Mrs. Hardcastle's orphaned niece, Constance Neville (Christina Ames) broke the dream of Mrs. Hardcastle by not marrying her beloved spoiled son Tony Lumpkin (played by John Gardiner), but became the love of George's life. Both Ames and Gardiner did a lovely job in their deceitful skimming. Mary Carol Magnazini (Mrs. Hardcastle) added that motherly figure in Kate's life that worried about everything and, of course, wanted the best for everyone. The rest of the cast also did an outstanding job in their supporting roles.

So who did *She Stoops to Conquer*? I'll let you go and discover for yourself. It plays through Saturday. Tickets at 654-2281.

by Di Carrier