

# 'Flea' best when all stops are pulled out

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In the theater world, summer is the season for silly and Palos Verdes Players' current production, "A Flea in Her Ear," fills the bill.

Probably the best-known of turn-of-the-century (last century, that is) playwright Georges Feydeau, the play is a classic bedroom farce full of double-entendres, slamming doors, misunderstood motives and mistaken identities. Imagine a slightly raughty version of "I Love Lucy" — amplified by director Jack Drake's dressing the entire cast in 19th-century underwear — and you're there.

Feydeau's plots always revolve around philandering, real or imagined. Sometimes, the philandering that's *not* going on is even better. In "Flea," the action begins when Raymonde Chandebise (Melissa Brandzel) becomes suspicious of her husband Victor (James Rice), whose attentions in the bedroom have taken a sudden and dramatic nose dive.

The audience is let in on the real answer right away, a presumably temporary case of performance anxiety; but manly pride prevents Victor from revealing this to his wife. Instead, Raymonde is left believing that his energy has been sapped by some extracurricular activity.

Determined to catch him in

## REVIEW

"A Flea in Her Ear" plays at 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday through Sept. 18, 2 p.m. Sunday and Sept. 12 at Palos Verdes Players, 2433 Moreton St. (near Lomita and Crenshaw boulevards), Torrance. Tickets: \$12-\$14. Information: 310-326-2287.

the dastardly deed, she enlists the aid of a girlfriend, Lucienne (Esther Harvey), and sets a trap: a letter from an anonymous female admirer luring him to a hotel well-known as a trysting place for illicit affairs.

Naturally, the plan goes awry. Raymonde's letter arrives; Victor reads it, has a moment's laugh and decides the letter must have been sent to him by mistake, sending his handsome, unmarried friend Tournel (Jeffrey Thomas Klotz) to the rendezvous instead.

Matters are further complicated by a series of mistaken identities, multiple hotel reservations in the same name, revolving beds and characters attempting to deliver critical messages in unintelligible speech.

In farce, the secret to success is excess, and PVP's "Flea"



Sid Idris plays Don Homenides and Esther Harvey is Lucienne in Palos Verdes Players' production of "A Flea in Her Ear."

works best when its cast members pull out all the stops. My favorite portrayal was Sid Idris' Don Homenides, the quintessential hot-tempered Latin aristocrat who's constantly run-

ning off half-cocked while belching a stream of expletives, in perfectly accented Spanish.

Also very funny is Martin James as Camille, who does his character's bizarre speech im-

pediment without a single slip. And Steven Koller, who doesn't get so much as a line of intelligible dialogue, turns his minor role (as the German hotel patron, Schwarz) into a memorable comic performance.

Brandzel is charming as the pampered and peevish Raymonde, and Rice gives a serviceable rendition of the dual role of Victor and Poche.

Director Drake's mastery of the play seems right on target, but he appears to have problems managing the large cast. Scenes built around physical humor come off like clockwork. Other, more talky scenes tend to drag, losing valuable momentum that's hard to recoup even when the action speeds up. (Those moments were exacerbated in the show's opening weekend by cast members who were less than on top of their lines.)

Fortunately, there are enough comic payoffs to make it worth waiting until final curtain, aided in fine fashion by Sam Uskovich's ingeniously constructed set. For a summer evening's entertainment, this "Flea" has plenty of bite.