

Park Cities People

Issue Date: August 17, 2007, Posted On: 8/17/2007

Mama's Run Off with Maurice!

Old folks do the darndest things at Contemporary Theatre of Dallas

By Glenn Arbery

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Senior Editor

Anything dramatic about old people these days seems to center on the problems of Alzheimer's, so it's refreshing to see Andrew Bergman's play from the 1980s, *Social Security*, at Contemporary Theatre of Dallas.

Somehow it seems more innocent, though that's probably the wrong word — or at least you'll think so when you hear some of the saltier bits of dialogue. But the questions aren't metaphysical ones having to do with identity and forgetfulness, they're just social ones about inconvenience and the finicky demands of old people.

Martin (Randy Pearlman) and Trudy (Mary Margaret Pyeatt) have decided to leave Trudy's mother Sophie (Linda Comess) with her other daughter Barbara (Marcia Carroll) and her husband David (Nye Cooper).

That's because Martin and Trudy's daughter Sarah, who just went off to college, has rebelled in spectacular fashion against her overprotective parents, and they now feel compelled to go to Buffalo to check on her. Barbara and David, sophisticated art dealers with no children of their own, will have to take care of Sophie in their upscale Manhattan apartment.

Wielding a walker loaded with supplies, such as sourballs and the Kleenex she spits them into, Sophie seems impervious to Barbara's concerns, the foremost one being that David is just about to arrive with the world-famous painter Maurice Koenig, who is himself approaching the century mark.

Sophie can't see what the big deal is, because her husband was also a painter, albeit of houses. Barbara, played with a kind of mordant desperation by Marcia Carroll, tries to get her mother out of her housecoat at least, with hilarious results.

SOCIAL SECURITY

CONTEMPORARY

THEATRE OF DALLAS

Director: Cheryl Denson

Starring: Marcia Carroll, Nye Cooper,
Mary-Margaret Pyeatt, Randy
Perlman, Linda Comess, and Harry
Reinwald

Through September 2

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There's nothing very surprising in the plot, though the twists are always pleasures, and there are many small home truths that keep it funny. Linda Comess has the most difficult role to pull off, because she has to make the transformation from the Sophie helpless without her walker to the Sophie about to run off to the south of France with the nonagenarian Maurice.

She does it movingly, and both Marcia Carroll and Harry Reinwald play adeptly off her performance in their very different ways.

Randy Pearlman as Barbara's brother-in-law, an accountant who appreciates art as an investment but can't see anything in the



Photo: George Wada

World-famous artist Maurice (**Harry Reinwald**) falls in love with Sophie (**Linda Comess**) in Andrew Bergman's *Social Security*, playing at Contemporary Theatre of Dallas.

canvases themselves, has a stock role to play, but he does it with a set of his mouth — held a little open as if in suspicious scorn and apprehension — that instantly brings home his character. Mary-Margaret Pyeatt plays the stern Trudy with a brittleness that makes her seem starved of every affection.

The one bit of miscasting might be Nye Cooper as David, not so much because he doesn't do a good job on the whole, but because the role itself doesn't allow his wild comic talents enough range. He seems constricted somehow, and his interactions with Marcia Carroll, especially when they have to dance, seem too stiffly performed.

At some point in the future, Contemporary Theatre of Dallas is going to wake up from its long, nostalgic dream of the 1980s and do something that actually lives up to its name. In the meantime, it's a pleasure to see a small comedy like *Social Security* done well.