



CAPE COD TIMES

SIMON'S 'RUMORS' AIMS BARBS AT COUNTRY CLUB SET

By Johanna Crosby, *Cape Cod Times*

Nobody's better at creating neurotic characters than Neil Simon.

And eight of them create combustible laughter in his riotous 1988 comedy, "Rumors."

The plot-driven play was Simon's first and very funny attempt at farce. The production, presented by Elements Theatre Company, is a sheer workout for your funny bone thanks to Sister Danielle Dwyer's deft direction and a fine, well-balanced ensemble cast who serve up comical depictions of their quirky characters. The laughs are steady with hilarious sight gags, physical comedy, mistaken identities and confusion and Simon's trademark one-liners.

Simon uses "Rumors" to poke fun at the status-conscious, country club set.

Four well-heeled couples face a dilemma when they show up for Charlie and Myra's 10th anniversary party only to find the host holed up in his bedroom with a superficial gunshot wound to his earlobe and his wife and the help missing. They go to any length to protect their reputations and fabricate preposterous stories that lead to zany twists and turns. It's great fun to watch these self-absorbed folks make utter fools of themselves.

Ken and Chris are the first couple to arrive and hear the gunshots. As Charlie's lawyer, Ken is concerned about protecting his client, the deputy mayor of New York, from a scandal. Ken refuses to call the police and forces Chris to lie to the other couple's and pretend nothing's wrong. Over the course of two acts the other couples engage in the cover-up which fuels the comedy. Lies pile upon lies leading to total confusion and hilarity.

Chris Kanaga is unflappable as the logical lawyer Ken who becomes unglued by the goings-on, especially when he accidentally loses his hearing. Dwyer is very funny as his tense, frantic wife Chris. Her exasperated phone conversations with Charlie's doctor are comical.

Brad Lussier plays the hyper Lenny who visibly suffers from whiplash from a car accident. He's funniest when he poses as Charlie and tells the police a convoluted story. Ellen Ortolani is deliciously funny as Claire, his catty, gossipy wife.

The tension is between the openly hostile couple, Glenn and Carrie, played by Luke Norman and Kate Shannon, is palpable.

Brother Stephen Velie and Rachel McKendree are amusing as the obnoxiously affectionate couple Ernie and Cookie. A fine physical comedian, the ever-smiling McKendree engages in various contortions to deal with her character's back spasms.

The first act ends in a very funny scene in which each character is engaged in his and her own hang-up. The highlight of the second act features the couples dancing frenetically to "La Bamba."

As the two no-nonsense cops, Kyle Norman and N. Karen Catlin are perfect straight men to the loony bunch.

'Rumors' fly at Rock Harbo

By Ellen Petry Whalen

Playwright Neil Simon is an expert at taking a slice of American life and fully examining it on stage, transforming the ordinary into the hilarious. "Ru-

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mors," Simon's 1988 Tony Award winning play, now at The Elements Theatre Company in Orleans, revolves around eight characters' neuroses and how they become more pronounced under pressure.

The farce begins with a couple arriving for Myra and Charley Brock's anniversary party. They discover the hosts will not be able to attend their own celebrations due to Charley's inexplicable gunshot wound and the Myra's mysterious disappearance. One of four couples invited to the party, the anxious Chris Gorman (Danielle Dwyer) and the paranoid lawyer Ken Gorman (Chris Kanaga) decide it is in their friend's best interest, the deputy mayor of New York, if these events are not shared with the other guests.

Then the gossipy Clair Ganz (Ellen Ortolani) and the jumpy Lenny Ganz (Brad Lussier) turn up shortly after having a car accident in their days-old BMW. Soon they are included in the ad-hoc cover-up as the two couples run around attending to their wounded friend while trying to keep the rumors from percolating.

The pace picks up when zany cooking show host Cookie Cusack (Rachel McKendree) and her psychoanalyst husband

(Stephen Velie) add to the fun with her crazy back problems and their lovey-dovey antics.

The couples seem bored with their high-powered, pampered lives and everyone gossips about each other's marital affairs. New York State Senate candidate Glenn Cooper (Luke Norman) tries to improve his hopeless marriage by appealing to his snooty, insecure wife (Kate Shannon) "I would like us to be the way we were, before we became the way we are."

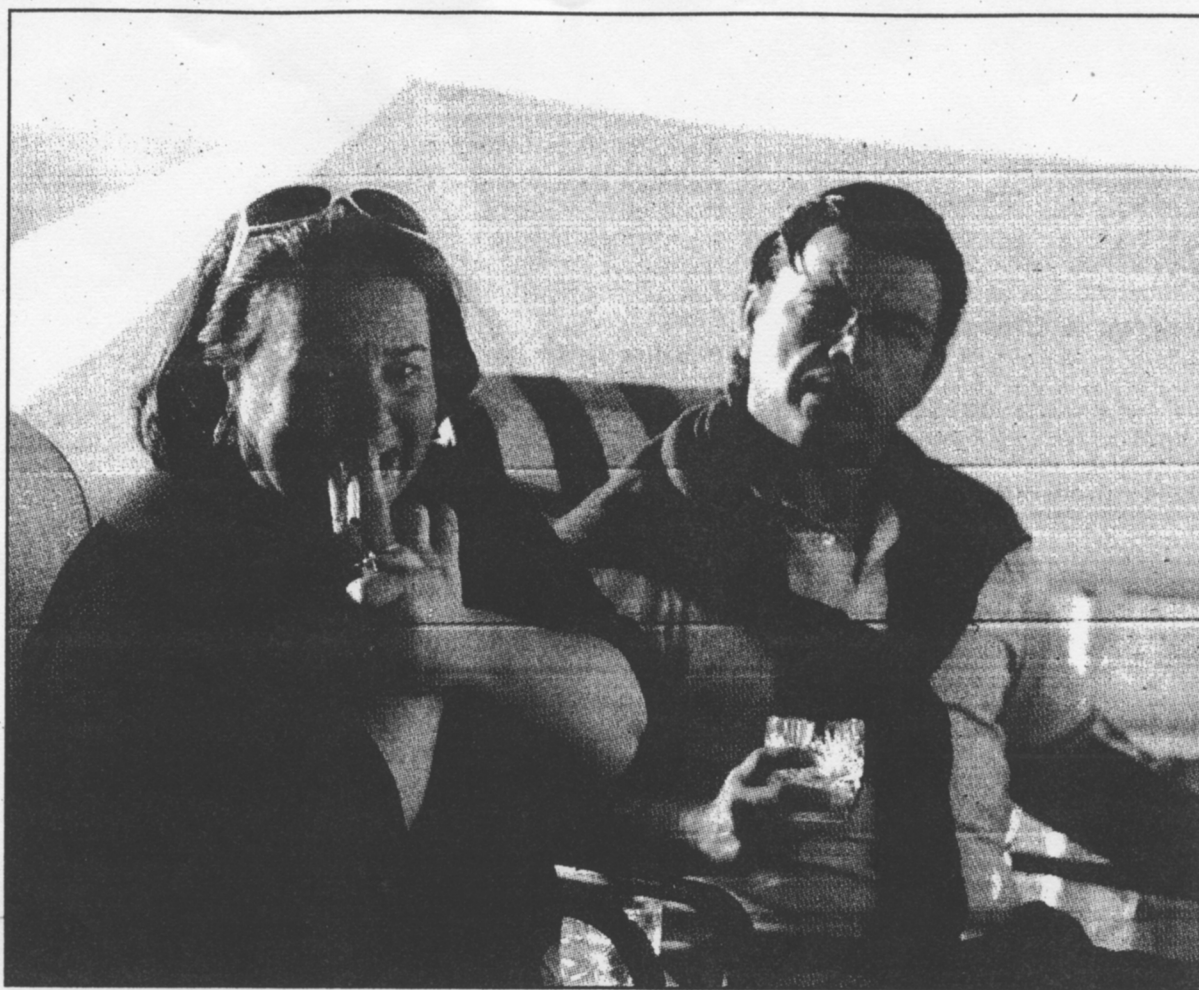
Simon's brilliant word play is heightened by the fast-paced plot. Doubling as the director, Dwyer

makes sure each character's tics are fully developed to produce constant laughter as the show spirals to its surprising conclusion. The talented cast expertly manages the tricky and well-timed dialogue and coordinates the many entrances and exits that add to the madcap plot. As the hyper accountant Lenny, Lussier brings the audience to repeated bouts of laughter with his physical contortions and his broken attempts at Spanish as he creatively explains the evening's events to the police (Kyle Norman and N. Karen Catlin).

The set design by Soren

and Hans Spatzek-Olsen and Peter Shannon is extravagant with its rich, contemporary style. The costume designs (Michelle Rich, Gail Gibson and Sandy Spatzek-Olsen) are very posh and befitting the country club set.

When Elements Theatre Company puts on a show they sometimes have a Saturday après-theater gourmet meal on their patio over-looking Rock Harbor. Happily, their current production of Neil Simon's fast-paced comedy "Rumors" offers this wonderful option, only adding to a delightful night out at the theater.



Danielle Dwyer and Chris Kanaga star in Elements Theatre Company's production of 'Rumors' by I

The Barnstable Patriot

RUMORS HAS IT: THERE'S A GREAT PLAY IN ORLEANS

Written by John Watters, *Barnstable Patriot*

It's a funny thing about rumors. They take on a life of their own, often becoming so embellished from the original seed of truth that they spring into a full grown tree that looks nothing like the original.

Such is the case in Neil Simon's hysterical play, *Rumors*, now being performed by the extremely talented Elements Theatre Company in Orleans. The play was America's most prolific playwright's first attempt at a farce. According to the production notes he started by placing four very well-heeled couples in an absurd situation to see how they would act. The result of his experiment is uproarious in nature, a sheer delight to watch, and wonderfully entertaining in the adept hands of Elements' ensemble cast.

Set at an elegant dinner party planned to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Charlie and Myra Brock, the twisting tale starts to unfold when guests begin arriving in tuxedos and evening gowns, only to find Charlie, the deputy mayor of New York City, lying in his bed with a gunshot wound to his earlobe, and his wife and domestic help nowhere to be found. As each pair of guests arrive they each evaluate the situation and in an attempt to cover up the truth to protect their friends and themselves, they make up outlandish excuses to disguise the truth.

Every facet of Elements' production sparkles. The tight ensemble cast feature four couples and a pair of policemen who each carry his or her share of the workload to make it a very even show.

Chris Kanaga and Sister Danielle Dwyer, as Chris and Ken Gorman, are the first pair to enter the house and find things not quite as they should be. In the effort to protect their friends from embarrassment they start the ball rolling into an evening of subterfuge. Dwyer wears two hats in this production beside playing the highly neurotic Chris, who would kill for a cigarette to calm her nerves, she also has directed this masterpiece. Kanaga, a familiar face to Elements theatergoers also gives an impeccable performance, adding much comedy to the piece when he temporarily loses his hearing.

The next pair are Ellen Ortolani and Brad Lussier as Claire and Lenny Ganz, who en route to the party end up in a car accident in which Lenny receives a whiplash injury. Eager to know

why something doesn't seem quite right they quickly catch on to the skewed situation and start adding their own slant on the storyline. Both actors carry off their characters with aplomb.

Soon the next guests to arrive are Brother Stephen Velie and Rachel McKendree as the overly affectionate pair Ernie and Cookie Cusack. Ernie is a psychiatrist and Cookie has, what else, her own television cooking show. To make things appear as normal as possible they jump into the kitchen to prepare dinner before the last couple arrives. To add to the hilariousness, Cookie has severe back spasms that make her require a walker to be able to stand upright. Her contortions make for many belly laughs from the audience.

The last couple to show up for the soiree are Luke Norman and Kate Shannon as the cold, embattled pair Glenn and Cassie Cooper. Glenn is running for the state Senate, but that doesn't help endear him to his wife, who believes he is also running around on her.

Kyle Norman and Karen Catlin play a pair of cops, Officer Welsh and Officer Pudney, who show up to try to figure out what in the heck has been going at this house on this crazy evening.

Set designer Soren Spatzeck-Olson should receive special props for creating an elegant apartment set that would rival any theater's work at any level. The spacious living room with balcony and doors aplenty to make the fast-paced comings and goings easy is a thing of beauty.

Elements Theater continues to produce top-notch, high-quality theater at its beautiful Paraclete House home, and should draw crowds from all over the Cape to see their excellent work.