

Mimes' 'Don't Drink Water'

by J.D. Piro

"I wonder if this is happening at any other embassy," moans Axel Magee, acting ambassador to an Iron Curtain nation and the inept hero of Woody Allen's *Don't Drink the Water*. Probably not, since no other embassy has an administrator quite like Magee, the only foreign service diplomat ever recalled from an entire continent. "I've worked in 17 U.S. embassies," notes Magee. "Some for as long as three weeks."

With credentials like these and a knack for starting diplomatic crises that makes Andrew Young look like a statesman, it's no wonder that *Don't Drink the Water*, the first fall show by the Mimes and Mummies, succeeds as a fast-paced, funny comedy. The production overcomes some conspicuous flaws to emerge as a solid evening of entertainment.

Tom Mooney, FC '81, portrays Axel, son of the permanent Ambassador, who is temporarily left in charge when his father takes a trip to the States. Axel's diplomatic skills are put to the test immediately. A family of tourists bursts into the Embassy, seeking sanctuary from the secret police. While sightseeing, the Hollanders have mistakenly photographed some secret missile sites. Having to defend his fellow countrymen against the charge of espionage, the diplomat's son rises to the occasion, explaining "Look, you spy on us, we spy on you—everybody knows it. Why do we pretend it's so unusual?" The communists lay siege and the Hollanders and their daughter become unwilling guests in the Embassy, sharing accommodations with a refugee priest, an eccentric chief, and Magee's scrupulous assistant, Kilroy.

Mooney plays Magee to perfection. The character comes across as a funny, lovable klutz. Confident of his ability to bring the Hollanders to safety, Magee asserts, "I can handle a crisis." Kilroy retorts, "Handle one? You are one!" Mooney's clumsy sincerity wins the audience over.

Joe Cronin, FC '80, and Louise D'Arcy, FC '81, portray Walter and Marion Hollander and both are excellent in the roles. Cronin can get laughs just with his facial expressions. Cronin and D'Arcy are able to handle the Woody Allen repartee with the right amounts of cynicism and bemused helplessness. Both display an excellent sense of timing. Cronin is at his best when expressing his exasperation at his partner in his catering business back in the States, whose bargain-basement meat has just struck down several customers. In one scene, D'Arcy hands him the phone call from his partner while imploring him to "be nice"; Cronin grabs the phone. "Hello, cretin," he says. "Poison any more people?"

Director Don Bushmann never lets the pace slow. This is extremely important with



Louise D'Arcy, Tom Mooney and Joe Cronin in 'Don't Drink The Water'

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an Allen script, which contains a barrage of fast one-liners. Jim Manoussos, GS '80, set design has created a splendid embassy with a good solid look to it.

Several flaws are apparent in the production, not the least of which is Collins Hall, which succeeded once again in killing a lot of the best punch lines. Lighting design is poorer than usual; the extensions built over the orchestra pit are horribly lit, and the cast often finds themselves playing in darkness in that area. Although the material is fine, the references to Dean Rusk, Sonny Liston, and Lyndon Johnson—which would have been altered with the slash of a pen—reveal the age of the 1967 script.

The calibre of performances varies among the supporting cast. Jose Gonzalez, FC '82, is fine as the priest-in-hiding. Father Drobney, who has taken up magic to pass his time in political asylum (Marion says, "I think it's wonderful that a man of the cloth has a hobby besides God.") Drobney's clumsy at-

tempts at legerdemain end up annoying Walter, but Drobney is positively ecstatic at finally having an audience. Vince Moreno plays a fine heavy and bears a striking resemblance to Peter Lorre in his role as Krojack, the chief of the communist police.

But the other supporting players are nowhere near as good, exhibiting a lack of depth in the cast. Charles Rogers, FC '82, walks through the role of Kilroy with a bored look on his face which does not change even when the delicious Kilroy imagines he is the Wright Brothers. Joe Harding, FC '81, gives a horribly overplayed performance as the chef, managing to upstage everyone. Wendy Paterson, FC '82, plays daughter Susan Hol-

lander, who sports the most spectacular wardrobe ever worn by an American tourist behind the Iron Curtain. Displaying no sense of timing, Peterson runs over her funniest lines and puts a certain blandness into such gems as "Life is a series of adventures you go through with someone you care about."

But the success or failure of *Don't Drink the Water* rests ultimately on the performances of the three principals. And these are more than adequate to make *Don't Drink the Water* a highly entertaining premiere for the 1979-1980 season of the Mimes and Mummies.

Don't Drink the Water finishes its run Friday and Saturday nights at 8:00 in Collins.