

Fo's comedy arrives

By Carla Johnson

ITALIAN PLAYWRIGHT Dario Fo has enjoyed popular success, on stage and television, for over a decade in Europe. But Michiana audiences have not had the opportunity to experience Fo's vigorous, slapstick political comedy. Until now.

Fo's farce about an Italian housewives' protest over food prices, "We Won't Pay! We Won't Pay!" opens at 8 p.m. today. The play continues at 8 p.m. Saturday, with a matinee at 2:30 p.m. Sunday, and again at 8 p.m. May 16 and 17.

The Notre Dame/Saint Mary's Theatre under the direction of Mark Pilkinton present the play in O'Laughlin Auditorium on the Saint Mary's College campus.

The play takes theater audiences "back to basic farce" in the spirit of '50's TV sitcoms like *I Love Lucy* and *The Honeymooners*, Pilkinton, associate professor and chairman of communication and theater arts at Notre Dame, explained.

The play features two couples who share friendship and the same working-class apartment building.

MUCH LIKE *Lucy and Ethel* of '50's fame, Antonia (Monica Smith) and Margherita (Ann Marie Borgman) violate their husband's wishes and become involved in a protest over food prices.

But after joining other Italian housewives in carrying off stolen food from the supermarket, they face the problem of hiding the loot from their husbands in the confines of their small apartments.

The initial situation leads to inevitable complications. Margherita, "pregnant" with canned goods and pasta, screams, "It's all coming out!" And a thick-headed police officer (Peter Hendrickson) interprets the situation as the beginning of a miscarriage.

The naivety of Giovanni (Jack Blakey) and Luigi (Michael Grant)



PREVIEW

leads to still more farcical complications. At one point, Giovanni takes seriously his wife's insinuation that he should eat bird seed and make a soup of Martz Mountain.

THE PLAY has political substance, however. "It is really about social responsibility," Pilkinton said.

After having had seen Fo's work performed in London, chose to direct it because Fo is "very important in Europe, and because he's very funny."

Fo is a Marxist who believes that "all political parties have failed the workers. He believes the working class should transform society."

"His farce has a firm political message," but Pilkinton is doing the play because it is such good comedy. "I'm going more for the comedy," Pilkinton said. "Fo is a better poet than politician, much like Brecht."

He feels that people who like TV sitcom but may not usually go to the theater, would enjoy this play. The television style comedy in the play reflects Fo's work on Italian television. "He is famous for his Smothers Brothers-type television show," Pilkinton noted. "He is a virtuoso performer."

THE SET for the ND/SMC performance was designed to heighten the '50's television effect. Set designer Willard Neuert, associate

professor of communication and theater, noted that one of his goals has been to enable the audience to view the set as though viewing a video shot through the camera's eye. He wanted the audience to see "within" the kitchen of Giovanni's apartment.

A rake (slanted) stage utilizes visual perspective to scale down the auditorium, creating a sense of intimacy. Traps were also removed from the state floor to give the feeling of a thrust stage and a forward feeling to the action.

Like the sets of television's *Lucy* and *Honeymooners* shows, there is "not a lot of set dressing, no attempt to create reality," Neuert explained. "This is the sort of working class apartment Ralph and Alice would live in."

Furnishings in solid colors appear stark against walls which seem to have been splattered with paint.

"The splatters resemble the dots in newspaper print," Pilkinton noted. The splatters and solids are meant to create a cartoon-type effect. Sound effects, all created by an on-stage musician, also serve to accentuate action in the mode of cartoons or old-time movies.

BOTH PILKINTON and Neuert are new to Notre Dame this year. Pilkinton comes from seven years in theater at the University of Michigan and says he was hired to "revitalize theater at Notre Dame." Neuert comes from work on the West Coast as a special artist for Walt Disney.

Pilkinton notes that he has made some major changes in Fo's script. The most important was to cut the play from three to two hours in performance time.



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JACK BLAKEY plays Giovanni and Monica Smith, Antonia, as the St.Mary's/Notre Dame Theatre troupe puts the finishing touches on Italian playwright Dario Fo's political comedy "We Won't Pay!"

"We Won't Pay!" The production opens at 8 p.m. today in O'Laughlin Auditorium on the Saint Mary's campus.

He also made some "language changes," primarily in elimination of unnecessary obscenities. He "eased up" on humor directed against Catholicism and the Pope, though quite a few jibes were left in.

The political impact of the play makes it "worth doing," Pilkinton says, but he promises "a wonderful, fun, zany, crazy evening."

Carla Johnson, a student in the University of Notre Dame English graduate department, frequently covers theater for The Tribune.