

PASADENA THE CITIZEN

Lifestyles

Fun with eight sisters in PLT's 'Octette Bridge Club'



The ladies of the "Octette Bridge Club" dress up for Halloween and hold their talent show. (front row) Robyn Lyn, Kay Jones, Jada August, (back row) Carolyn McLeod, Barbara Hartman, Julie Owen, Katie Reed and Mary Margaret Lobb will entertain crowds weekends at Pasadena Little Theatre, 4318 Allen-Genoa Road, through April 4. Call 713-941-1758 for reservations.

By **GLORIA WALKER SMITH**

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Sometimes you just want simple, uncomplicated entertainment that is well done. Material that contains "real people" stuff – no syrupy, overly naive dialogue, no heavy conflict that tires you out, but conversations full of hilarious laughter, emotions with restraint, sprinkled with some "prickly" little comments – once in awhile, a temporary confrontation, but always over-laid with a family's genuine love.

Sound good to you?

Pasadena Little Theatre's "Octette Bridge Club" by P.J. Barry opened last weekend at 4318 Allen-Genoa Road, just south of Fairmont. Kathy Woods directed a made-in-Heaven cast of eight women and one young man – the women are sisters and the young man (Colton Wright) is a photographer, who is picturing one of their every-other-week Friday night bridge parties - bridge sessions that have been rotating from one sister's home to the other for three years. The time is now 1934 in Rhode Island – the Depression is still hanging on, but the sisters seem to have fared pretty well. Irish Catholics who try to decide which one is the "most religious" and when All Saints Day is approaching and the subject comes up about visiting Mama and Papa's graves, the gloves come off between these

genteel ladies!

Some of these delightful cast members are familiar old friends to those who frequent PLT, but into the mix come performers new to PLT and what additions they are! Martha, the oldest sister, introduced us to Barbara "Bunny" Hartman, who is debuting at PLT, but bringing years of stage and backstage experience with her. Practice makes perfect and this lady has practiced! Martha is a somewhat cantankerous character, so the actor in that role has to try to make the audience understand her and like her. Bunny dedicates her performances to her son and hero, Sgt. Evan Grabenstein, who is on his second deployment in Afghanistan. (Our thanks to him.)

Mary Margaret L. Draughton, who plays the vivacious, flamboyant Lil, the musical sister who leads the singing from her seat on the piano bench ... but there's a BIG secret here. Mary Margaret never played the piano before and never sang before ... she learned this during rehearsals for the play! Now, is that dedication and flair?

Kay Jones (Mary Donovan), Spanish teacher in Friendswood, has made the rounds of area theaters, acting and directing. She handles the frailty of Mary Donovan in a sensitive and optimistic manner. Robyn Lyn as the youngest sister, Betsy, is also making her PLT debut. This role is perhaps the most difficult as the once vibrant 30-something battles with deteriorating emotional problems – even going to the fortune teller, Madame Gambino, which costs a whole dollar! After treatment, withdrawn Betsy emerges as quite a hilarious "fan dancer."

Here I go with that word again ... "stalwart." It sounds stodgy and boring, but it's a high compliment, suggesting that an actor can always be depended upon to deliver, no matter what the role. No better description of the following: Julie Owen as Ann, mediator/peacemaker sister; Jada August as Alice, steady and understated and Carolyn McLeod as Connie, the avant-garde sister, who wants to "get on with the darn game." Katie Reed, directing, designing the lights, writing plays or acting, makes every outing a unique pleasure for the audience. As sister Nora, she makes it clear she is proud of her night watchman husband and her two boys and if it takes standing up to a domineering sister, so be it! Unforgettable is their ability to switch from the sublime (down on their knees praying for the military) (I thought "God Bless America" WAS the national anthem!) to the ridiculous talent show in costume for Halloween.

As the years roll by, the Octette Bridge Club is a constant among the changing times. The year is now 1944 and the sisters are dealing with sons in the fighting, being widowed and facing phases of menopause. They, like other wartime women, are more assertive and independent than they once were, but still knit together with silver strands of family love. Through it all, it's the laughter and the unbridled silliness that provides the glue.

The ladies will be at home at PLT on weekends through April 4 – evenings at 8 p.m. and Sundays at 3 p.m. Remembering this one will make you smile for a long time, so don't miss it. Call the box office for tickets at \$14 and \$12 for seniors and students, 713-941-1758. There's a special performance on Thursday, April 1 at 8 p.m., where you can get "2 for 1" tickets. Call soon – these always sell out fast.

"Let's get on with this darn game!" (and harmonize on "Sweet Violets").