

Troupe evokes Coward's wit, style in 'Blithe Spirit'

Ageless romp captivates with fully realized acting

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Written by **BODEN DAY** The News Journal



Charles (James Michael Reilly) tries to explain to his wife, Ruth (Christie Parker, right), that the ghost of his first wife, Elvira (Beth Hylton), is in the room in a scene from "Blithe Spirit." / Courtesy of DTC/MATT URBAN

THEATER REVIEW

WHAT: "Blithe Spirit" by Noel Coward

WHERE: Delaware Theatre Co., 200 Water St., Wilmington

WHEN: Through March 20. 8 p.m., Wednesday through Saturday; 2 p.m. Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday

TICKETS: \$35-\$49; adults who buy ticket within 30 minutes of the show can bring a teenager free.

INFORMATION: 594-1100; www.delawaretheatre.org

Last week, when Domenick Scudera, director of Delaware Theatre Company's "Blithe Spirit," brought his college students to the Noel Coward cocktail comedy, they were, he observed, "very attuned to the relationships ... and captivated by the lightning wit and physicality of the characters."

And so, too, will be theatergoers of any age as they experience the equity troupe's respectful, sharply realized take on this 70-year-old but ageless and most frequently performed Coward farce.

Kudos to Scudera for not having his players limn their roles as cardboard parodies of Coward characters. Rather, there's a vibrant consonance to this production. It's apparent as

the seven actors perform together with the precision of Coward's sharp, staccato style.

It's manifested in John Raley's gleaming, pop-up storybook-style set that encourages the play's kinetics. And it's palpable through Brian Strachen's well-researched costumes, Shelley Hicklin's evocative lighting, and John Stovicek's in-the-pocket sound design.

This wry domestic romp involves British fuddy-duddy novelist-socialite Charles Condomine (played by James Michael Reilly), who employs the force-of-nature medium Madame Arcati (Meghan Colleen Moroney) to give him grist for his next book.

The scheme backfires, as it must, when Charlie's manipulative -- and long-deceased -- first wife Elvira (Beth Hylton) is conjured up and she, whom only Charlie can see and hear, attempts to end his current marriage to the stylish, "sensible" Ruth (Christie Parker).

Then there's Edith (Sarah Doherty), the Condomines' slow-witted new maid, and for ballast, village doctor and natural skeptic George Bradman (Peter Delaurier) and his practical, somewhat gullible wife, Violet (Ceal Phelan).

The Master, as Coward was known, once snarked, "I hate the new solemnity in the theater." No threat of that in this production, Sir Noel. No threat at all.