



SKIP THIS 'DINNER': (left to right) Adam James, Jennifer Tilly & Ben Daniels in *Don't Dress for Dinner*.

Photo: Joan Marcus



Theater Review

Don't bother with *Don't Dress for Dinner*

DON'T DRESS FOR DINNER

Written by Marc Camoletti

Adapted by Robin Hawdon

Directed by John Tillinger

American Airlines Theatre

227 West 42nd Street

(212-719-1300), www.RoundaboutTheatre.org

By David NouNou

This is yet another one of those mindless British comedies that the Brits crank out on a regular basis; the more famous ones being *No Sex, Please, We're British*, *Run For Your Wife*, and *Boeing-Boeing*. Thankfully, most of them never end up on these shores. Slapstick runs amok here. They run for years and years on London's West End because every poor, unsuspecting tourist who visits the UK metropolis gets these shows as part of their package deal, and ultimately someone thinks it is wise to transfer them to New York. And you might ask yourself: Why did they bother?

I saw this show in 1992 in London (yes, I was a tourist, and yes, it was in my Visit London tour package). I thought to myself, "Well, how bad can it be? After all, it was written by Marc Camoletti, who gave us the infamous *Boeing-Boeing*." Afterward, I thought it would never come to New York. I was proven wrong, for it managed to stay away for 20 long years, but thanks to the Roundabout, it is here, and I'm asking myself: Why did they bother?

Imagine a lame episode of TV's "Three's Company" with mistaken identity, pratfalls, faces in the crotch or other body parts, broad faces and exaggerated bad acting. This will give you an idea of what is in store for you in *Don't Dress For Dinner*. Instead of Jack, Chrissy and Janet, substitute a married couple: she is going out of town to visit her mother for the weekend; he has invited his mistress. She cancels her plans due to the fact that her lover is coming over, who also happened to be the best man at their wedding. A cook comes to cater the dinner for the husband's tryst, and her name is Suzette; she is mistaken for the mistress, and her name is Suzanne (they are both nicknamed Suzie), and you now have an idea of how lame this farce actually is. At least with "Three's Company," you always had the option of changing channels. Here, you don't have that luxury.

Not since my college days as a drama major have I witnessed such broad, bland, and bad acting trying to pass itself off as farcical. As the married couple, Bernard (Adam James) and Jacqueline (Patricia Kalember), he is dreadful; she is passable. As their friend and best man Robert, one wonders how a fine actor like Ben Daniels got himself involved with this mess? I guess he figured if Mark Rylance could win a Tony Award for *Boeing-Boeing*, which was also written by Camoletti, he had an equal opportunity.

Thank goodness for Spencer Kayden playing Suzette, the chef, and Jennifer Tilly, playing Suzanne, the mistress. Ms. Kayden plays confused and Ms. Tilly plays her usual ditsy self; they supply some plausible attempts at humor. Director John Tillinger has inserted every gag and shtick imaginable since the dawn of man. Talk about overkill. Wow, what a mind-numbing season this has been for the Roundabout. What were they thinking? If you have a penchant for farce and mistaken identity, I suggest opting instead for *One Man, Two Guvnors* at the Music Box Theatre. At least that is a brilliant import and worth paying good money to see.

Edited by Scott Harrah

Published April 26, 2012

Reviewed at press preview performance on April 19, 2012

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