



NOVEMBER 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, DECEMBER 1, 2

**HAPPY FAMILY**  
by Giles Cooper  
(by arrangement with Evans Plays)

**Cast:**  
Deborah Solstice ..... MARLENE PENN  
Mark, her brother ..... JOHN FENNER  
Susan, her sister ..... ELSPETH DALES  
Gregory Butler ..... TOM ATKINSON  
  
Director: WILLIAM WILKINSON

The action of the play takes place in Deborah's cottage in Huntingdonshire on a Friday afternoon and evening in Spring.

*There will be one 15 minute interval*  
*Curtain down approximately 9.30 p.m.*

Set Design ..... John Collins  
Stage Manager ..... Nik Collins  
Assistant Stage Managers ..... Dorothy Fenner, Susan Hamilton  
Hazel Clews, Steve Davey  
Lighting Design ..... Richard Pemberton  
Sound ..... Ken Enston  
Wardrobe ..... Nancy Howell  
Construction Crew ..... Kenrick Badger, Albert Whitehart  
Jon Blomfield, Keith Berry, Roger Morris, Di Phipps,  
Brian Doughty, Rod Davis  
Photographs ..... Roger Harris, Martin Savage

**High level of drama**

"Happy Family"  
Loft Theatre, Leamington  
DIRECTED by William Wilkinson, "Happy Family" is a strange mixture of passion, fears, innocence and guilt, whipped up and soothed in the games the family play.  
The success of the Loft Theatre Company's production lies in the full realisation of each character and a high level of drama is sustained throughout.  
Marlene Penn plays Deborah, the younger sister, with tender naivete, the girl sheltered from life but bullied by her brother and sister.  
Elspeth Dales, in the part of Susan, is assertive to the point of cruelty, and John Fenner as brother Mark is sinister in his threats and pathetic in his fear of the dark.  
Gregory, Susan's fiance, who desperately wants to belong and is drawn into the games, is played by Tom Atkinson with a touching anxiety to please that changes to fearful flight when the closeness of the family becomes overpowering.  
This riveting production continues until Saturday.  
SUSAN HOWELL



LOFT THEATRE FIFTY-SEVENTH SEASON 1978-1979

NO SMOKING IN THE AUDITORIUM

**FUN AND GAMES AT THE LOFT**

"Happy Family" is the title of the Loft Theatre's current production, and "happy family" is the myth perpetuated by Mark Solstice and his two sisters. The price they pay is painful: rejection of the rest of the world and retention of the games and interactions of their childhood days.

Giles Cooper's play focuses on one day when, for a brief moment, an opportunity to break out of the safe yet stifling pattern presented itself - and what the result turned out to be. There is plenty to laugh at in the way this set-up is presented, and William Wilkinson's production allowed full scope for the comedy element. But there is more to it: a taut, classically-constructed play like this needs equally taut direction.

The alliances and alignments of the family members, sparked off by the intrusion of an outsider in the shape of Susan's fiance, change with a speed which demands a slick pace coupled with frequent underlining of what's going on. It is impossible to fault the production on these counts.

**CRUMBLES**

Mark, whose precarious self-assumed position as head of the family crumbles whenever the lights go out and his terror of the dark floods over him, is played by John Fenner with the appropriate tension and fridity. Elspeth Dales's Susan (nicknamed "Duchess") seems at first thoroughly in command of herself, but the cracks had to be there and are gradually revealed in a fine performance. Deborah, the innocent but elemental sister on whom the others project their own eccentricity, gets a lively and, at

the end, moving characterisation from Marlene Penn. The fiance, Gregory, something of a games-player himself - but out of his own league in this family, receives the required under-statement from Tom Atkinson.

**ATMOSPHERE**

John Collins's country cottage setting reinforces the

atmosphere of a backwater cut off from the mainstream of contemporary life: skilfully constructed, too, from the look of it.

The author himself plays games with the audience: we wonder continually what's going to happen next. In the event, he brings the action full circle in what is, as we realise, the only possible conclusion.



