Witty duo perform at Wilbur Theater

By John Montagne

Modern America has no shortage of funny men. We can turn on a television set and watch a man who is incredibly "situation comedy" or go to any one of hundred of nightclubs and listen to cogger comedians tell Negro jokes... and pictures of the Jewish president until the Kingston Trio comes on. It takes a little imagination, but Michael Flanders and Donald Swann seem to remind us what humor is.

Very different

"At the Drop of Another Hat," currently playing at the Wilbur Theater, is everything that American entertainment is not. There are no performers; Swann plays the piano, Flanders carries on as a comedian, and Swann is the singing part. They write both the words and the music themselves. Throughout the show, Flanders sits in his vestibule like some great, hairy stud, while Swann peers just barely behind his glasses and sings up front at his partner's jokes. The only prep on stage is a tall standing lamp with a slightly faded, distinctly middle-class fringed shade.

That something so incongruous and well written could sound so ensupable to anyone raised with Hollywood's fantastic efforts to keep us all amused. The secret is simple. Flanders and Swann are incredibly funny men. Flanders has ascended, been worn so lightly—or so well—as during Flanders' careful explanation of why his French horn is missing—"to the music of a Mozart horn concerto. Seldom has Henshaw been so hilariously parodied as in the topic monologue about "Los Olivadors," a description of the offstage sounds of Andorra. Seldom have the 'First and Second Laws'—that's right, you've been so well explained as in the duo's running, juicy treatise on acoustics.

More than this

But the British pair, doing their second tour of America, have more than wit. Swann's lovely setting of "Billie's Song" from J.R.R. Tolkien's popular "Lord of the Rings" trilogy indicates the sensitive understanding and the musical talent which both these men possess. When we laugh at them, we all laugh together at ourselves, without bitterness or rancor.

Some of the songs of their last tour have become so popular that they are regarded as classics by us younger folk—songs like "The Hippopotamus" and "Moonbeams," both of which were presented as entertainers. But the act is still timely, witty, and effective.

Even the modern student attitudes were brilliantly parodied in a ditty called "(a) p^{18}, (b) p^{18}..." a song about the new intellectual freedom, and the fascination of the high-IQ's for words like "pee-pot-belly-bum-bum-bum." (Can you imagine a Walt Disney movie called 'Christopher Robin Meets Fanny Hill'?"

"At the Drop of Another Hat" offers that great rarity, originality. Any student who likes to be relieved from his usual grieves should try to see this outstanding entertainment while it's in Boston.

You mean, because I'm a student or teacher, I get special rates at all Hilton Hotels in the U.S.?