

# Getting Around

By ETHEL SIMMONS



## Inspiration came from a true story

Former Detroit Milan Stitt is the successful playwright whose heavy drama "The Runner Stumbles" continues its Michigan premiere run through March 19 at Meadow Brook Theatre.

Interviewed recently in the Green Room of the theater, on the Oakland University campus, the 37-year-old playwright was just as happy to recall fond memories in the Detroit metropolitan area as he was to discuss his stage achievements.

Stitt said he first lived in Detroit and later, after his parents moved to Pontiac, "sold popcorn at the Miracle Mile." Stitt's father, Howard, and stepmother, Madeline, now live in Birmingham.

"The Runner Stumbles," a searing drama of a priest and nun in an isolated northern Michigan community, ran six months on Broadway last year. "It has had 1,000 productions around the world since then," Stitt said.

STITT BASED his play on the true story of a priest who went on trial for the death of a young nun.

"It intrigued me how such a thing could have happened," he said. It happened, according to Stitt, because of "contaminant."

Stitt said he wanted to discover what kind of man would be involved in a situation that would end in murder. The play is as much a story of two gods—vengeance and love—as it is a love story, he said.

Describing himself as "a fallen-away Methodist," he housed his imagination to fill out the play's dramatic details. He read actual court transcripts later, out of curiosity, and found six lines that were identical to ones in his script.

He also discovered, "The church really is on a hill looking down at the town. For me, it works metaphorically."

Stitt said the town where the incident happened, at the turn of the century, was named Isadore. Because of the play, tourists have been flocking there and the town changed its name. "We must tell everyone it's Cedar," he said. "The nun is buried in the church yard now, and tours are asking to see her grave."



Playwright Milan Stitt talks about "The Runner Stumbles." (Staff photo by Douglas Bauman)

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