By HELEN ZUCKER

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Superb ensemble acting saves the Birmingham Village Players production of Michael Christofer's play, "The Stadow Box."

I use the word saves because I'm not save "Shadow Box." Is a play, despite the fact that Christofer's work has won both the Tony Award and the Pullitzer Prize since it opened in New York in 1977. There is a puzzling new genre abroad; plays that ask us to accept generatives, disease and death, not only as subject matter but as central thesis.

The play runs through Friday-Saturday, Nov. 30 and Dec. 1, at the Birningham Village Players playhouse on Chestnut and Hunter.

In "Shadow Box," we journey from

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In "Shadow Box," we journey from three people dying in pleasant cottages near a hospital in California to three people dying (in the same place). In other words, we go from point A to point A, and we leave the theater knowing no more about death than we can ever know. Death is not a funny business.

SEVERAL PEOPLE left the theater on opening night, reminded of relatives who died in similar fashion. I left, won-dering if social workers had taken up

uering it social workers and taken up playwriting.

"Shadow Box" ends on an affirma-tive note, telling us to appreciate each moment, each word while we are here and the play reminds us to be kind to each other while we're around. The heart of the work deals with the terri-fying effects of terminal illness.

Somewhere the message is dutifully sounded that we should all be told in childhood that we die, that everything dies, that death should be accepted as natural.

natural.

I'm not so sure about that. I'm with Dylan Thomas who wrote to bis ferrill "Do not so." "Do not go gently into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the

light."

The play follows Dr. Elizabeth Kebler-Ross' five stages, leading to acceptance of death: Denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.

HELEN PARRISH as Maggie, a New Jersey housewife who cannot ac-cept her husband'd death, and Jim Schless, as Joe, her Willie-Loman-like husband steal the show. I believed Ms.

eview

Parrish implicitly when she cried des-

Parrish implicitly when she cried des-pairingly:
"Come home! I want you to go bowl-ing four nights a week so I can yell at you for coming home late. I want to get up at six in the morning to make you breakfasts you never eat just because you want my company! What will I do? Fall asleep on the soft awatching TV for the rest of my life?"

the rest of my life?"

Death, it seems, is harder on the living than on the dying. But Schless, who has accepted the fact that he is dying, cannot accept what his life has been. In a very nice twist, he shouls his answer:
"What was it? What did I have?
Twenty-four years in a flatwork factory?"

ry?"
Maggie reminds Joe, "You had a sa-loon for two years." "Gone," Joe says.
'A truck for a while," Maggie says.
'A truck for a while," Maggie says.
'Gone," Joe replies. "All gone."
And the two discuss the house while together, the neighborhood that came up around it, the grandchildren they never had. Through it all, Joe rages, "What, what was it all?"

rages. "What, what was it all?"
They are a touching pair. The final scene, when Maggie reconciles herself to Joe's death, rang false through no fault of Ms. Parrish. Christofer should have stayed with the people he created and forgotten about theories. A woman who drags a ham 3,000 miles, who buys a red chair for a husband she is determined to have home in any condition, does not smile and climb into a cottage (the shadow box) where death write. (the shadow box) where death waits.

AS THE WIFE who rages against the dying of the light, Ms. Parrish is marvelous. Especially since: Christofer's prose isn't always the most inspired. Brian Clouthier as their son is intense, confused and bent on strumming his guitar.

Diane Lodewyks turns in a stunning performance as Agnes, the unloved daughter of a blind, strong-willed old lady. Havling played second fiddle to Claire, her older sister, as a child in a fatherless home, she now writes letters she signs "Claire" to read to her mother.

Felicity, the dying old woman, wonderfully acted by Martha Welton, will
not accept the fact of Clair's death in
an accident many years ago. This is a
pair out of "Psycho."

Agnes sings hymns, the perverse old
Felicity sings. "foll me over in the clover," and argues with "The interviewer
The control of the after, is on speaking
terms with "The Interviewer," too.
Ms. Lodewyks gives us the most truly pitiable person in the play, a girl
who gains no insight, who is dead in
youth, who has never known anything
but pain.

NONE OF THESE people have any money, and how they all came to this fancy dying place is never explained. The only one with the means to be there is a bud writer named Briangley entire the state of the

BILL HAYCOOK, the wonderful Renfield of last season's "Dracula," is smooth as glass as "The Interviewer." Director Tom Wittlinger and assist-ant director Grace Gilmore deserve ku-dos for bringing such a difficult work to life. The set, by Tim LaRoy, was marvelous. Lights by Larry Sweet, were effective, and the lack of a cur-tain was positively ingenious.

Area man plays in 'Godspell'

Richard A. Schrot, son of Mr. and Mrs. John Schrot of Bloomfield Hills, is appearing in "Godspell." a musical revue based on the Gospel according to St. Matthew. "Godspell' is playing at the Wayne State University Studio Theatre, downstairs at the Hilberry, through Wednesday, Dec. 5.

day, Dec. 5.
"Godspell" was written in 1970 by
John-Michael Tebelak as a project for
his master's degree at Carnegie-Mellon
University. It has since become one of
the most popular musicals of this decade, having been produced both on and

Theater

off Broadway, adapted into a successful film version, and a one time performed by more than 16 professional companies around the world. It has been called one of the most innovative plays in modern theater and comblites many theatrical devices—position, in migrovisation, vaudeville antics and minstrel show acts.

THE SOFT ROCK score by Stepen Schwartz, composer of the hit musical "Pippin" (to be produced at the university's Bonstelle Theatre later this season), includes such familiar song as "Day by Day" "By My Side" and "Turn Back, Oh Man."

Tickets and information are available from the Wayne State University Theatre Box Office, Cass and Hancock, Detroit. The telephone number is 577-2972. Most performances are already sold out.

SEATS \$1.50 TH BANK











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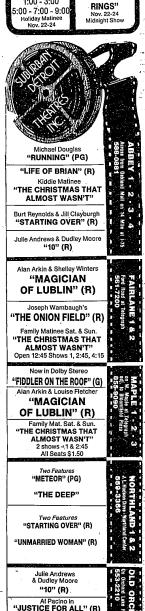
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"LAUGHS!"

BLAKE EDWARDS

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ORCHARD 1 At Pacino in
"JUSTICE FOR ALL" (R) Kiddle Matinee
"THE CHRISTMAS THAT ALMOST WASN'T Michael Douglas
"RUNNING" (PG) TERRACE 1 30400 Plymouth Rd. n 937-1717 427 Marion Brando "APOCALYPSE NOW" (R) Mat. Wed. 1 show 1 p.m.

1 & 2 Id near Mids 27-1200 "STAR TREK" Starts Fri. Nov. 16 "SLEEPING BEAUTY" (G) Mat. Wed. 1 show 1 p.m.

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"ARABIAN ADVENTURE" Joseph Wambaugh's "THE ONION FIELD" (R)