

Critics take a look at season's opening dramas

'Madonna' at Actors Alliance

The Michigan premiere of the Actors Alliance Theatre production of "Madonna of the Powder Room" by Paula Cimar continues through Nov. 6 at Lycee International, on Evergreen and 13 Mile roads, Southfield. For ticket information call 642-1326.

By Cathie Broidenbach
special writer

A well-acted production of "Madonna of the Powder Room" by Paula Cimar opens the second season of the Actors Alliance Theatre Company in Southfield.

The professional theater company is presenting the Michigan premiere of this intense play.

In "Madonna of the Powder Room," six women — three mothers and their grown daughters — gather in Bessie Puleski's kitchen for Irma Sovik's retirement party. They drink a potent peachy punch, reminisce, giggle, bicker, dance and cry as they talk their way past the reassuring woman-talk and get what burts in their lives — dreams that died and truths that went stale.

Shirley Benyas is superb as Bessie, who wants everything clean and nice. This irritates her daughter, Martie, played by Donna Heczek with appropriate caustic insensitivity. Evelyn Orbach puts in a gutsy, fine performance as Irma, once you get over the fact that



Evelyn Orbach is Irma Sovik (left) and Irene Schreyer is Violet in "Madonna of the Powder Room."

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'Cyrano' at Meadow Brook

The Meadow Brook Theatre production of Edmond Rostand's "Cyrano de Bergerac" continues through Oct. 30 on the Oakland University campus near Rochester. For ticket information call the box office at 377-3000.

By Cathie Broidenbach
special writer

In "Cyrano de Bergerac," Meadow Brook director John Ulmer captures the robust, swashbuckling vitality of France in the mid-1600s, the period Edmond Rostand chose for his famous verse play about romantic love.

It was an era when dandies strutted in velvet and plumed finery, when gallant soldiers disdained danger and gentlemen wooed ladies with eloquent verse. It's all on the Meadow Brook stage where designer Peter Hicks has created fine period sets.

During a scene change on opening night, the audience applauded in appreciation of the sets, while stagehands worked under a dark proscenium arch.

Act I of "Cyrano" churns with activity. Dozens of players on stage radiate vitality and high flicks of the times. Only at moments does the activity lose its intelligent, satirical focus and become mere commotion — as when the jesters' antics border on frantic silliness or when the "starving" poets wolf elairs in the bakery.

FOR ALL the puns and bombastic humor, sword fights and noise and vibration of cannon fire that would measure at least six on the Richter scale, "Cyrano de Bergerac" is a sad and tender love story.

Eric Tavares brings intelligence and depth to the part of Cyrano, the dashing, big-nosed hero who's as quick with his sword as he is with his tongue. His richly resonant voice and impeccable delivery are perfect for a hero who knows the power of word as well as he knows the strength of self-sacrificing, romantic love.

Maureen McDevitt as his love, Roxanne, is beautiful and plays a rounded character, not just the stereotyped object of Cyrano's affection. The excellent leads outline a generally good supporting cast in this play that begins with boisterous swagger and ends in quiet tenderness.

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