

Uneven production still hits the heights

Performances of the Will-O-Way Apprentice Theatre production of "The Gingerbread Lady" by Neil Simon continue Fridays-Sundays through April 28 at Bloomfield University School in Bloomfield Township. For ticket information, call 644-4418.

spice. Evy Meara (Francine Hachem), an alcoholic has-been singer, has an addle wit and a vinegary outlook. Just back from a drying-out period at a sanitarium, it surprises no one when Evy quickly reverts to her old habits. Though friends and family try to be supportive, Evy is bent on self-destruction.

"Gingerbread Lady" has its share of the witty banter that is Simon's trademark. Its serious side, however, does not offer particularly fresh insights into the universal truths it explores, namely that drinks tend to revert to form and make life hell for their family and friends.



Barbara Michals

Hachem is at her best portraying Evy's anguish and frustrations. While her early one-liners do not achieve maximum effectiveness, she clearly warms to the role and imbues it with a lot of heart. At times Hachem's lines seem truly wrenched from inner torment, though one never learns what set off Evy's downward spiral. (Which came first — her drinking or her failed marriage and career?)

TRYING TO SPARE her teen-age daughter Polly from witnessing her further disintegration, Evy tries to dissuade the girl from coming to live with her. As Polly, Lissa Almasy is physically awkward in her stage movements but has an engaging smile and buoyant delivery. Wisely or not, Polly accepts a situation she can-

not change and offers her love and support without conditions. Evy also receives sup-

port from two longtime friends, Dennis LaLone gets lots of laughs as Jimmy, a homosexual aspiring actor, but he is too full of affection to elicit proper sympathy when his own moment of crisis comes.

Faye Kimberly is convincing as Toby, Evy's other staunch friend. Hopelessly vain and unable to cope with advanc-

ing years and a broken marriage, Kimberly is touching as she recites a litany of her past lovers to keep up her crumbling self-assurance.

Larry Cates plays the caddish Lou Tanner, a down-and-out musician who drifts in and out of

Evy's life and abuses her both physically and emotionally. Cates looks convincing but needs more animation. Similarly, Dan Grogan is wooden as the Puerto Rican delivery boy, a small role with enormous comic potential.

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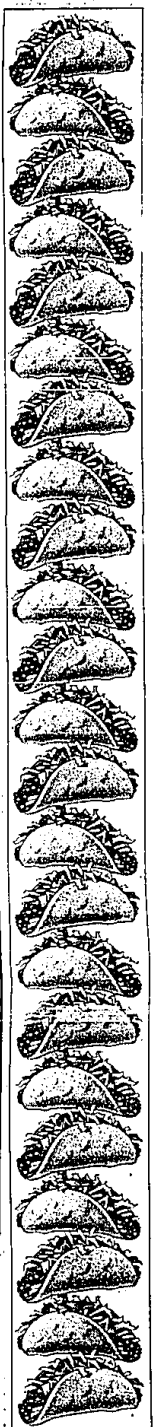
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