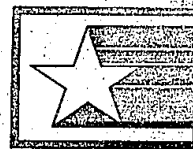


Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



Thursday, October 24, 1985 O&E

(No-Box)110



Henrietta Hermolin and Carl Kniseel are Nettie and John Cleary in the Actors Alliance Theatre Company production of the triple-prize-winning classic drama "The Subject Was Roses."

Domestic drama is strong

Performances of the Actors Alliance Theatre Company production of "The Subject Was Roses" by Frank D. Gilroy continue through Saturday, Nov. 23, at 30800 Evergreen in Southfield. For ticket information call 642-1325.

The Actor's Alliance Theatre Company's fine production of Frank Gilroy's "The Subject Was Roses" reminds us that a good play doesn't need an earthquake happening at its center.

"The Subject Was Roses" is a 20-year-old play about nothing more spectacular than an ordinary middle-class family from the Bronx sorting through its troubles. The Clearys (father, mother and son just home from duty in World War II) lack the flamboyant glamour of the Ewing clan, and their problems don't blaze across headlines or head up chapters in sociology books about the latest form of domestic abuse or sexual devolution.

Yet "The Subject Was Roses" won drama's triple crown in 1965 — the Pulitzer Prize, the New York Drama Critics Award for the Best Play and the Tony Award.

Gilroy stakes out a narrow turf as his subject — the least communication between three people in a family, and within the confines of that domestic circle he creates a tight play with masterful dialogue and subtle characters whose roots go deep.

TOLSTOY SAID, "All happy families resemble one another, but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." So it is with the unhappy Clearys, and Gilroy plumbs their intricate troubles to create three distinct and memorable characters.

Director Jeff Nahan is up to the challenge of casting John, Nettie and Timmy Cleary.

The play opens when the family is coming down from a party celebrating Timmy's safe return from the war. Before he's been home even a day, old tensions begin to surface. There's John and Nettie's willed marriage, an arrangement riddled with suppressed anger and unsatisfying to both, but nevertheless bound to continue by genuine caring and by memories of how it once was between them.

Timmy takes up his old position in the family triangle as his parents' jockey for his time and allegiance. Henry Bennett as Timmy shows his acting skill best when Timmy resorts to drink because he can't handle the tensions.

Nobody comes to a present moment without the baggage of the past passing judgment or making demands on the present. Part of what makes "Roses" a mature play is the expert way Gilroy gives each character a past that impinges on the present. Henrietta Hermolin turns in a solid, admirable performance as the ladylike Nettie who married John for his high Irish energy so



Cathle Breidenbach

unlike that of her refined father, then laments ever after that John isn't more like her father. Such are the convoluted ironies that have the ring of truth in "Roses."

CARL KNISEEL as the temperamental father, John Cleary, keeps tension on its toes and masters the dynamics of his character in an exceptional performance. John Cleary is a moody, self-made man trying to curb his natural dominance to let his son become adult.

The Actors Alliance Company stages productions in the gym of the Lyceum International. Despite the difficulty, keeping the gym has the advantages of

dramatic flexibility. Artistic Director Jeff Nahan stages plays in the round or in the three quarters, according to what best suits each production.

No matter what the staging, the audience can count on sitting close to the action and sometimes virtually in it. Even the farthest seat in the house is the equivalent of third row prime seats in a traditional theater.

The seating creates an intimacy impossible for larger theaters to duplicate. In "Roses" the tight scope of the three-character play seems made for the flexible staging and the intimate seating that Actors Alliance does so well.

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