

Revival retains play's strength

"Performances of the Actors Alliance Theatre Company production of *"The Women Here Are No Different"* by Nancy Beckett, directed by Jeffrey Nahan, continue through Sunday, March 22, at Smith Theatre on the Oakland Community College Orchard Ridge Campus in Farmington Hills. For ticket information call Actors Alliance at 642-1326. Proceeds from each performance will benefit activities of the Womencenter on campus.

Cockroaches and domestic violence suffer from the same mistaken prejudice: People think that only poor, uncivilized folk are plagued by them.

Four years ago when the Actors Alliance Theatre Company of Southfield first produced Nancy Beckett's unsettling play, *"The Women Here Are No Different"*, "nice" people had just begun to face the reality that all kinds of women — rich as well as poor, college grads as well as drop-



Cathie Breidenbach

outs — can fall victim to violence at the hands of men.

In *"The Women Here Are No Different"*, seven women weave together the stories of what drove each of them to find sanctuary in a shelter for battered women. The current revival of the play brings the same probing honesty and sensitivity to the problem of domestic violence as the first production did in 1983.

The original *"Women"* was staged at the theater/gym of the Lycee International where the audience sat just a few feet from the actresses. The revival takes place at the Smith Theatre at Oakland Community College in Farmington Hills. The tradi-

tional stage keeps the audience separated from the players.

THE NEW STAGING gains the relief of perspective but loses some of the original's emotional impact. Minor rewrites in the script cut one non-essential character and improve the structure of the play, which struggles to bring a unified focus to the lives of seven battered women precariously united while they try to launch new lives.

The 1987 cast returns four of the fine original players to their former roles. Divina Cook brings a stoic pain to the role of Ruth, a frumpy farm woman on the run. Dakunah

DeLaney recreates her role as the sassy, vital Dorothy, a survivor with four kids, and Annette DePetris returns as affluent Theresa from the suburbs, a wishful thinker and self-deceiver. Finally, Laurie Logan recreates her role as the compassionate Jeanette, a middle-aged wife suddenly on her own.

Three top-notch new cast members include Miriam Yenishak as the footloose Claire, who's only 19 and already a victim; Lis Zweifler, who brings a touching vulnerability to the role of Laurie, a woman locked in a cycle of love and hate; and Jan Radcliffe as Pat, the advocate running the center who knows better than to do out platitudes or simplistic solutions.

The women speak often of the men who wronged them, but the men are never seen and never allowed to speak for themselves. After centuries when women were ignored or discouraged from speaking out, *"The Women Here Are No Different"* gives them a long-overdue forum.



Laurie V. Logan (left), Lis Zweifler and Annette DePetris are in the cast of *"The Women Here Are No Different."*

But the fact remains: Women only tell half the story. Ghosts of the absent men haunt the play just as they haunt the women who fled from them.

of women, not with strident feminist politics, but by letting seven women tell their stories of crisis and struggle.

Cathie Breidenbach of West Bloomfield has always loved theater. A former high-school English teacher, she works in public relations, advertising and as a freelance writer.

2 leads make 'Tribute' a real banquet

Performances of the Ridgedale Players production of *"Tribute"* by Bernard Slade continue at 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday and 3 p.m. Sunday at the playhouse in Troy. For ticket information, call 644-8328.

It's feast or famine, as the Ridgedale players bring Jack Lemmon's Academy-Award-winning role to light in Bernard Slade's *"Tribute"*. The minor famine of supporting actors is more than compensated with the banquet laid on by the two leads, making a satisfying *"Tribute"* after all.

Lemmon won an Oscar for the role of Scottie Templeton, a raffish card who makes the world his straight man. Alan, Scottie's just-diagnosed leukemia, which kinks his no-commitment lifestyle. Scottie has made a lot of friends, and a testimonial dinner is the skeleton holding the play's vignettes together.

Scottie's one regret is his non-relationship with his son, Jud, an uptight, academic nebbish. The blythe between Scottie and son, plus their successful reconciliation (you gotta ask), make the show. Ridgedale's leads are more than adequate to the task.

Bob Balderson has the unenviable job of following up a well-known Oscar-winning performance. He comes through beautifully, playing Scottie with a goofy, Buddy Hackettish charm. His transitions from hale to



Chuck Moss

beat and sick are smooth and plausible.

KENT MARTINI starts out in awkward bluster but falls into seductively earned Jud with jerky grace. The two, Balderson and Martini, work with well-oiled emotional precision.

The same isn't true for the rest of the cast, whose portraits range from wooden to stone. Fortunately, the show is sustained by the strong duo, and there are flashes by the minors: Julie Klock Tillotson is a believable, nurturing first wife, and the New

York party girl Sally is well-acted by Elissa F. Marcus.

The set is Scottie's Big Apple apartment, either very rich or pre-rent control. The costumes are accurate

contempo-Manhattan and the staging well done. Kudos to director James Trick, assistant director Kate Creitz, and "producer" (tech boss) Donna Backus. But most of all, applause to Balderson and Martini, whose sure hands efface an Oscar winner and make it Ridgedale's own.

Birmingham resident Chuck Moss is a free-lancer who writes on a variety of subjects including a personal column for the Observer & Eccentric.

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