

'Brighton Beach Memoirs' brings family close

Performances of Neil Simon's "Brighton Beach Memoirs," presented by the Theatre Guild of Livonia-Redford, continue through Saturday, May 9, at the playhouse in Redford. For ticket information call 522-8057.

Director Mattie Wolf has done a masterful job of casting the Theatre Guild of Livonia-Redford's current production, "Brighton Beach Memoirs," especially in achieving the feeling of real families, rather than stage families.

One is seldom conscious of the "acting." Rather one feels more like an voyeur, looking in on very private



Bob Weibel

moments that all families have experienced at one time or another. The family in this case belongs to playwright Neil Simon. This mostly autobiographical work recalls what it's like growing up in a poor Jewish

family during the Depression in New York. Actually, there are two families living under one roof. One is dependent on the other. Therein lies the human much pile of conflict and guilt leading to crisis and humiliation.

IN THE MIDST of this endless trail of troubles we find Simon, dis-

guised as Eugene, and played to perfection by Vito Guerra. Eugene is the only comic to make it in the play. It's young Simon with a funny perspective of events. His comic delivery is superb.

Guerra slips effortlessly from narrator to performer in episodic scenes depicting boyhood memories of baseball, dreaming about girls, running errands, learning about girls, being blamed for things that go wrong, trying to talk to girls, surviving an angry father, thinking about girls, eating liver and cabbage, talking to your older brother about girls, being the family gofer and so on.

Pat Varga is excellent as his mother, Kate, who holds the family together. John Battle gives a sterling performance as his older brother, Stanley, who must choose between a

job and dignity. David Berg is very good as the overworked father, Jack, who attempts to provide the money and wisdom to support two families.

Sue DeLoster is convincing as a young widow with two daughters to raise — and feelings of guilt for spurning off her sister's family. Kathy Leitz and Amy Rosenthal are both good as the daughters, Nora and Laurie, who would prefer a home of their own.

Lighting is well done, and the set design is exceptional. Somehow they crammed two bedrooms, a bathroom, a hallway, two entrances, a kitchen, dining room and living room on a 30-foot stage.

Bob Weibel of Westland is a freelance writer, who has spent more than 25 years in community theater as a director, designer and performer.

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