

Thriller 'Deathtrap' is a real arm-clencher

Performances of the Meadow Brook Theatre production of "Deathtrap" continue through Sunday, April 17, on the Oakland University campus in Rochester Hills. For ticket information, call the box office at 377-3300.



Cathie Breidenbach

By Cathie Breidenbach
special writer

"Deathtrap" at Meadow Brook Theatre is a humdinger of a thriller. Warning — Don't wear rough-jointed jewelry on your arm or hands if you go with anyone excitable because the jewelry may become permanently imbedded when that someone

one clutches in panic during the juicy murder scene.

Of course, there's a murder, perhaps more than one, but I'd be on Ira Levin's hit list if I divulged who did it, let alone the cleverly worked out scheme of who gets "done in" and why. Director David Regal handles the wisecracking humor with just the right touch, even though the best jokes put down critics and their surly ways.

Levin's "Deathtrap" may skim

psychological surfaces and not qualify as profound theater, but it's a dandy thriller cocktail of unexpected reversals and knowing references to classics like "Angel Street," "Dial M for Murder" and "Sleuth." Just a hint of the plot may be enough carrot to lure thriller buffs to see Meadow Brook's exemplary version of the play that ran on Broadway longer than any other thriller.

SIDNEY BRUHL, a playwright suffering from a seven-year dry spell with no hits, gets a brilliant manuscript in the mail from a young writer named Clifford Anderson. Anderson tells Bruhl he sent the manuscript but off his typewriter before anyone else had read it or even knew

he was working on it.

Sidney invites Clifford to come "talk" about the play, and he casually remarks to his wife that he'd kill for a play as good as Clifford's. Surely he's kidding. The double-edged questions Sidney asks make his wife, Myra, worry, so she stays to chaperone the literary consultation between her husband and the fledgling playwright with the sure-fire hit.

Bethany Carpenter plays a wife who supports her husband as a good wife should but trusts him only to a point. When called upon to shriek and carry on with breathless drama, she comes through splendidly.

James Anthony plays Sidney with a witty, matter-of-fact ease ideally suited to the role of a commercial man of words. His facile tongue and fertile mind hatch plots for thrillers on paper — or otherwise?

On the wall of his den, Sidney keeps a grisly collection of weapons conveniently ready for whatever the plot demands. His den, which doubles as the scene of the crime, is an elegantly renovated stable attached to the main house. Peter Hicks set

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design for the den uses warm wood siding and a magnificent fieldstone fireplace to create a comfortable rustic charm that contrasts sharply with the thoroughly peculiar events that happen when Clifford comes to visit.

GEOFFREY DE LUCA plays an engaging Clifford with long, long legs and a boyish stock of dark hair that he flips out of his eyes with every carriage return as he fervently types his manuscript.

Helga ten Dorpe, a psychic living in the neighborhood, gets "vibrations" from the goings on and shows up at

inopportune moments. Jeanne Arnold as Helga slathers on the Dutch accent for comic effect and handles ESP humor with a sure touch. Sidney's sharp-but-dull lawyer, played with suave professionalism by George Gitto, rounds out the fine Meadow Brook cast in the thriller of the season.

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.

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