

# 'Sentenced to Life' uneven

Performances of the Trinity House Theatre production of 'Sentenced to Life' continue through Saturday, Nov. 20, at Livonia. For ticket information call 464-5302.

By Victoria Diaz  
special writer

Livonia's Trinity House Theatre opened its 1988-89 season last week-end with 'Sentenced to Life,' a challenging, contemporary drama about euthanasia, by Malcolm Mageridge and Alan Thornhill. While the production has its good points, unfortunately it also has some significant flaws.

The sometimes-didactic play, directed here by Laura Nissen, centers around a beautiful, talented woman who was once an accomplished pianist. As the play opens, she is almost totally paralyzed, the result of an illness which occurred a few years earlier.

Eileen has no real hope of recovery and, more than anything else, wants to die. Incapacitated as she is, she cannot kill herself, however, and must depend on someone else to do it. When her doctor rejects her plea, she desperately turns for help to her husband, Gerald, an articulate, respected proponent of euthanasia. But



Victoria Diaz

he finds himself with an apparent inability to act on his own expressed beliefs.

Eileen and Gerald, beset with a morally significant struggle that cannot be happily resolved, are in the classical sense tragic characters.

PAUL PATTON'S Gerald has his touching moments (most notably at the climax of the play), but generally he seems not beset by tragedy but merely befuddled, and often amusingly so. Patton appears miscast in a tragic role. It's almost as if he has wandered in from another play, a comedy, and is struggling to keep his face straight and a twinkle in his eyes under control.

He is charming, appealing, good-looking, and isn't at all wooden onstage. But rarely does he appear tortured or genuinely caught up in a tragic dilemma.

Kari Curmi, as the complex Eileen, fares somewhat better, although at times she seems to be suffering from a similar problem, especially in the first act. As the play opens, we see an Eileen who is so bright-eyed and almost perky it's difficult to believe this character wants nothing more than to die.

As the play progresses, however, Curmi does manage to become more convincing. Some of her best moments appear on a videotape, directed by Mark Barrera, which augments the onstage action and takes full advantage, in tight close-ups, of her remarkably photogenic, expressive face.

Beth Temple is a stand-out as the Vickory's young German maid who believes, "The right to die will someday become the right to kill." Gary

Brda as a prying television producer does a nice job, as does Lucien Choron as Eileen's well-meaning doctor and Elizabeth Bradford as an enthusiastic, right-to-die advocate.

"SENTENCED TO LIFE" is nicely paced, although one extra-long scene change, plus two 15-minute intermissions (during which the audience is asked to leave the auditorium), do impede progress a bit. Videotapes shown in the tiny Trinity House lobby between acts are intended as part of the play. An inventive touch, but a lot of their effect is lost in all the confusion and noise of an intermission.

Much of the background music for the production was composed by Fritz Schenk, and deserves special mention, as does impressive lighting effects by Lee Peterman and Dave Denis.

Victoria Diaz is a Livonia-based free-lancer, who specializes in arts and entertainment articles in the metro area.

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## Woodcarver to be guest

Woodcarver Patrick Smith, 34, of Drayton Plains likes having his work touched. In fact, he hopes kids will come up while he's demonstrating at Cranbrook Institute of Science 1-5 p.m. Saturday and ask to touch the big carving he'll be doing by the Indian tepees.

Smith donated several of his Indian masks, made in the style of real Indian masks, to the Institute just so his could be passed around and touched by school children.

He just finished a totem for a art room at Patterson School in Holly and is helping the students actually make another totem themselves.

He has a refreshing approach to life and art. "I think it's real important for people to value their artistic skills. My father taught Latin in the Cranbrook School. . . . One of my earliest memories, when I was 8 or 9 years old, is going to an openhouse at the school where my father taught. Mrs. Campbell, an art instructor, was making baskets. She let me touch and hold a basket and I loved it. It just turned me on."

The father of two sons, 10 and 7, he said he has given them bits of carvings so they can enjoy the tactile qualities of art as he himself did at that open house.

Smith studied woodcarving in Germany, occasionally teaches it in adult education classes and does a cable TV show. Several of his carvings are in the Detroit Artists Market Christmas show.

He was pleased to find out that another guest for the same event at Cranbrook Institute of Science, Native American Activity Day, will be Frank Ettawageshik, a Native American of the Ottawa tribe now living in the Grand Traverse Bay area.

Ettawageshik makes pottery in the tradition of his ancestors. He makes ancient Woodland Indian pots, mugs, bowls, vases and goblets. What started as a pursuit of his heritage has become a thriving business that supports his wife, an anthropologist, and their two children.

In addition to demonstrations by Smith and Ettawageshik there will be beading and quilling demonstrations, a storyteller known for his knowledge of Native American legends, face painting, make-and-take artifacts and cooking and tasting Indian foods.

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