



Robert Wagner and Stephanie Powers, onetime TV co-stars, are paired again in the play "Love Letters."

Heart-to-heart, a strong drama

"Love Letters" by A. R. Gurney continues through Sunday, Feb. 17, at the Fisher Theatre in Detroit. To order tickets by phone, call 645-6666, or call 872-1000 for more information.

By Ethel Simmons
staff writer

Seated side by side, with their scripts on the library table in front of them, Robert Wagner and Stephanie Powers bring alive the friendship — and love — over a lifetime between two WASPs of very different personalities. The huge Fisher Theatre stage dwarfs the two actors, who perform throughout the two-act production of "Love Letters" without moving from the table. Using their voices, facial expressions, and slight bodily movements, they convey the changes over the years, as the two go from grade school pals to adult friends, then for a time lovers, and back again to loving friends. In real life, Wagner and Powers have developed followings of their own through their movie and television roles and as co-stars of TV's "Hart to Hart" sophisticated comedy-mystery series. Wagner still retains his boyish charm and "cool," Powers her par-

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ticularly feminine manner and womanly warmth. These characteristics, along with their good looks, serve them well in their portrayals of the two friends who seek happiness in their private lives and careers. POWERS HAS perhaps the most challenging role, appearing as a vibrant female, daughter of wealthy parents but neglected. She struggles to find her way, and fails. Two broken marriages, drinking, and mental problems plague her but she maintains a bold, mischievous style. The entire play is presented with the actors' reading the exchange of letters they send, mostly to each other, through the years. While Powers as Melissa Gardner goes from ante to ante, Wagner as Andrew MacKaye Ladd III, attends Yale, serves with the Navy and then becomes a United States Senator. They have a love affair, which he ends to preserve his marriage and political career. Wagner handles all aspects of this characterization — the humor, the seriousness — with finesse.

'Bitter Friends' is fascinating

Performances of the Jewish Ensemble Theatre production of "Bitter Friends" continue through Sunday, March 3, at the Aaron Delloy Theatre at the Jewish Community Center in West Bloomfield. For tickets, call JET at 768-2900, visit any Ticketmaster outlet or call 645-6666.

By Barbara Michala
special writer

Asserting that "the questions are more important than the answers," the Jewish Ensemble Theatre's production of "Bitter Friends" is a highly provocative, compelling drama that leaves the audience somewhat stunned by all the questions it raises. Gordon Rayfield's play is a fictional work loosely based on the 1987 Jonathan Jay Pollard spy case. Pollard was a United States naval intelligence analyst sentenced to life imprisonment for giving Israel classified information on Iraq's chemical weapons buildup.

In "Bitter Friends," the real protagonist is the activist rabbi, Arthur Schaefer (Robert Grossman), who seeks to untangle the truth about accused spy David Klein (Allan Fox). Is the young Klein just a misguided idealist, trying to be a hero, or is he a pawn of the convoluted political maneuverings of the U.S. and Israeli governments? Was Klein himself to blame or was he recruited and then shamefully abandoned by the Israelis? Why did American Jews turn their backs on him, offering no pro-

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test to his harsh sentence? Such somber political issues are presented here without undue talkiness or polemics. The author claims to give a fair representation to all sides without attempting to resolve the issues. However, in actuality the Israeli government comes off looking even more heartless than the anti-Semitic State Department.

AS RABBI SCHAEFER, Grossman is excellent as a man who so values truth that he is willing to concede that many of the basic tenets of his life may have been mistaken. His face conveys the intensity of the questions tearing at him, yet the actor is equally effective delivering sardonic one-liners like a would-be Jackie Mason.

Fox is well-cast as the enigmatic, passionate Klein, quite willing to sacrifice himself for his ideals. William Preman is very convincing as the Israeli ambassador, seemingly gentle and sincere but quite used to the wary cat-and-mouse games of international politics. Charles McGraw is perfect as the

Justice Department's very WASPish Wingle. Whiting, more annoyed at being disturbed at his private club than at the hapless Fox's difficult plight. Andrew Dunn is also very believable as Congressman Frank Fitzgerald, a liberal with sharp insight into political realities. Henrietta Herimelin is only patri- cian as Klein's widowed mother, resentful that all she holds dear has been sacrificed for the good of Israel.

As Rachel, Klein's devoted wife, Stacie Passon borders on melodrama in her confrontations with her mother-in-law but does much better trying to be the voice of reason to her recalcitrant husband. Director Randall Forte does a fine job of sustaining the dramatic im-

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