

# Fine cast in 'The Shunning'

Performances of the Trinity House Theatre production of "The Shunning" continue through Oct. 31 at Trinity House in Livonia. For ticket information call 464-6302.



"The Shunning," making its U.S. premiere at Trinity House in Livonia, is a thought-provoking drama that is sometimes powerful, sometimes tedious. Canadian poet/playwright Patrick Friesen has set his play in a Germanic Mennonite community like the one in which he was raised. "Shunning" is the practice of forbidding community interaction to someone who has questioned or defied community standards. While the practice is well-known among Mennonites and other strict religious sects, the play is intended to make the audience think about other, perhaps more subtle ways in which shunning is practiced in our larger society. In the tight-knit Mennonite community, Peter Neufeld (Dan Millen) has made the mistake of voicing aloud his doubts about the existence of hell. The more pressure that is put on him by Loewen (Mike Stevens), the new minister, the more Peter stubbornly refuses to renounce his doubts. His stubbornness is then interpreted as a matter of pride, an even greater sin to the Mennonites.

Despite the urgings of his devoted wife, Helen (Christine Allen) and concerned brother Johann (Dan Zelazny) of Plymouth, Peter holds steadfast and is officially shunned by the rest of the community. Even his wife may have only limited contact with him. To save Peter's soul and protect the integrity of the church community, his life is made a living hell. Friesen captures the flavor and rhythm of the Mennonite community's German origins, and the cast does a fine job with the light accents. The author's style is tedious, however, because so much of the play is told through monologues, and the character's thoughts often ramble far afield from the central action. The play is most powerful



"The Shunning": Mike Stevens and Christina Allen in a scene from "The Shunning," now showing at Trinity House in Livonia. For reservations, call 464-6302.

when the characters are allowed to interact. Millen is very good at showing Peter's anguish in his isolation. Allen is convincingly distraught, torn between her love for her husband, and her obedient devotion to her church. Stevens is self-righteously pompous as the self-righteous Loewen. Zelazny's appealing grin and mischievous eyes help make Johann the most interesting character. He's a man who doesn't mind bending a few rules, but has the good sense to keep it to himself. Johann points out that while the Mennonites are perceived as universally devout, there are as many diverse personalities among them

as in society at large. Early in the play the author includes an ironic reminder that the Mennonites themselves were once persecuted for holding beliefs that differed from the predominant ones of the day. In the program notes, director Jeffrey Hedeon reminds the viewer that racism, bigotry, near pressure or treating an AIDS victim like a leper are also forms of shunning that can be physically and mentally violent. Barbara Michals is a retired Southfield English teacher. A theater critic for the last 18 years, she is an inveterate playgoer who regularly catches up on all the New York productions.

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