

# SRO's 'Painting Churches' poignant look at family

SRO Productions presents "Painting Churches" 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, 2 p.m. Sundays to May 19 at "The Burgh," northeast corner of Civic Center Drive and Berg Road. Tickets \$8 general, \$7 senior adults and children. Call (810) 827-0700. BY CARL BOCKSTEIN SPECIAL WRITER

SRO Productions of Southfield is currently featuring "Painting Churches" by Tina Howe. "Churches" is a drama with a cast of three that chronicles the struggles of the Church family as we come to discover the poignant heartache that underlies these characters' good sense of humor. The SRO playhouse, formerly a church, provides the perfect setting for an intimate look at the interpersonal dynamics of a troubled, but ultimately loving family: mother and father Church and daughter Mags.

While slowly boxing up treasures accumulated over the years in their Boston home, Fanny and Gardner prepare to move into their smaller Cape Cod cottage. Gardner is into the dusk of a famed and brilliant career as a poet. Fanny is hard edged and eccentric, not always patient with her husband's absent-minded ways. She puts on a festive green hat and nukes Gardner what he thinks. "Very becoming, very becoming," he says without even looking up at

her. Marvin Nachman gives a natural performance as Gardner who walks about quoting classical poetry and often forgetting the task at hand. Margaret Gilkes, who took over the role of Fanny Church just two weeks before the show's opening also succeeds, becoming the very essence of Gardner's brash wife of many years.

Enter prodigal daughter Mags, who has come home to Boston from New York to paint her parents' portrait before their move away from the old hometown. Kate Vivian as Mags is the extra spark that energizes the story. With her charming performance as the talented painter daughter of a poet father, Vivian helps "Painting Churches" come together as a whole. It had been a year since Mags had last come home and she is struggling with old childhood family wounds from the past as they resurface in the present. Ultimately, all these trials and tribulations evolve and resolve into a Church family epiphany. From their sadness comes their greatest joy.

Utilizing ample comic move-

ments over the course of this drama, the acting trio of Fanny, Gardner and Mags make "Painting Churches" a worthwhile experience.

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