

THEATER

Touching 'Eleemosynary' will lift your spirits



VICTORIA DIAZ

Apollon Theater Productions presents "Eleemosynary," 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, May 24-25, Roper Theatre, Birmingham Campus (Adams Road, between Maple and Big Beaver Road). Tickets \$9 adults, \$6 students, available at the door or by reservation, (810) 489-8445.

Early on in this contemporary, one-act drama, its central character explains the unusual title word. "Eleemosynary" means "charitable," she says. And then, because she is an individual who enjoys a kind of love affair with words, she strums all of its luscious syllables together again and adds, "It's like a small song."

REVIEW

Rarely does a playwright write a review of his or her play, of course. But with this line, you could almost say that Lee Blessing has managed to do exactly that. Brief, lyrical and with its own engaging riffs and rhythms, "Eleemosynary" will sometimes lift your spirits, sometimes touch your heart, and sometimes even tickle your ribs a little bit. More than that, you'll find that its melody soft - as it is - lingers on.

Here is the girlish, slightly hare-brained Dorothea, so full of life that she has plans for herself after she's dead. Here is Artie, the troubled, middle-aged scientist who is her daughter. And here is Artie's almost-grown daughter, Echo, fresh-faced and ambitious, and considering her

heritage and way with words, very aptly named.

As the play opens, Dorothea, has just suffered a massive stroke that has left her unable to communicate, and much of the story is told in flashbacks. Soon, we begin to see that the mothers and the daughters in this little group have been hard-pressed to communicate for most of their lives. Sometimes, words can't be found. Sometimes, words have been inadequate. Sometimes, words have simply gotten in the way of these highly complex relationships.

Veteran actress Laurie V.

Logan is a fine, animated Dorothea, seemingly warm and caring, then subtly exasperating, but always practically kiddy with life.

She adds just the right touch of off-handed humor, too, especially as she's telling of her "visits" with James Monroe and King Solomon or trying to teach her daughter to fly with some wings she's created.

Miriam Yezbick turns in a sensitive performance of Artie, who more than once turns her back on the so-human dependencies of her mother and daughter in order to salvage her own piece of

life. Despite these choices, Yezbick puts her close to our hearts, somehow. Looking always like someone who is trying to look relaxed when they are feeling sick-to-death tense, and also seemingly so close-to-bone familiar, Yezbick is almost painful to watch and to listen to at times.

Although her Artie is shy about physical touch, she is perhaps the most emotionally touching of the three women. Finally, Jaime Newman (who also produced this play) brings it all together with her enchanting portrayal of the youngest mem-

ber of the trio, Echo. With her singular stage presence and a kind of luminescent appearance, she just nails the role of this glowing-with-hope, confident girl.

In flashback scenes, the 18-year-old also gives a convincing performance as Echo in infancy and as a thumb-sucking toddler, too.

Award-winning director Mary Bremer sees to it that "Eleemosynary" is crisply-paced from first line to last, and peripherals such as lighting, make-up, set, and costumes are all first-rate stuff.

'Social Security' is deft, funny



HELEN ZUCKER

788-2900 or Ticketmaster (810) 645-6666 for ticket information.

Jewish Ensemble Theatre presents "Social Security" through June 9, Aaron DeRoy Theatre (inside the Jewish Community Center), 6600 West Maple Road, West Bloomfield. Call JET (810) 788-2900 or Ticketmaster (810) 645-6666 for ticket information.

The Jewish Ensemble Theatre production of Andrew Bergman's "Social Security" is deft and funny. Directed by Robert Grossman the troupe turns in a clean, tony performance. Cheryl Williams is superb as Barbara, the blond art dealer who serves cold mousse of pike (gelfish fish to Sophie, her mother). Williams exudes energy as she deals with her husband, the art world, a sister and brother-in-law she has little in common with, and a mother who is sent to live with her. Williams turns from near hysteria to plangent sexuality without missing a beat.

John-Michael Manfredi is wonderfully clever as David, Barbara's husband. David gets a lot of funny lines and Manfredi delivers them with aplomb. Manfredi looks as if he was born to play a suave art dealer; he looks sleek, satisfied, and smart. "I've been looking for a woman like that all my life!" David cries, upon hearing his niece has said, "I live for sex."

Rochelle Rosenthal as sister Trudy, comes on like a Long

REVIEW

Iceland storm. Concern for her daughter who is living with two men causes Trudy to pull up stakes to go off to Sarah's college. Trudy has parked mother and her walker in the hall and the first act ends with mother grinning wickedly as the lights dim. Trudy, the martyr from Mineola, is not treated well when it's time to hand out happy endings. The logic of the play dictates that anyone who isn't obsessed with sex deserves a bad end. Rosenthal carries it off with pluck.

Joseph Hayes as Martin, the accountant Trudy is married to, is a solid, stolid citizen. He has no sense of art nor does he appear to have any gift for happiness. Martin's turning out to be more like his daughter than like Trudy is a surprise and Hay handles this turn in the plot easily.

Karen Sheridan is wonderful as Sophie. Sheridan conveys a

sense of exasperation at being so old that her rejuvenation feels real. When she takes off her bathrobe (while Barbara screams, "Get dressed! We have a guest!") and stands there grinning in tee shirt and large bloomers, we know that Sophie is a woman whose senses are still very much alive. Sophie finds the man of her dreams, throws away her walker, looks chic, and is on her way to France and a condo in mid-Manhattan.

Robert Grossman as Maurice, the superstar painter whose still painting at age 98 (did I hear right?) is marvelous. Grossman gives us a purring lion, a wine-drinking, life-loving, Chagall-like painter. Maurice and Sophie take to each other immediately, and having no time to waste, go off immediately.

Artistic director Evelyn Orbach and the tech crew deserve kudos. The stunning set was designed by Tom Aston and built by West End Construction. Music from "Snow White" slides right into this fantasy-comedy.

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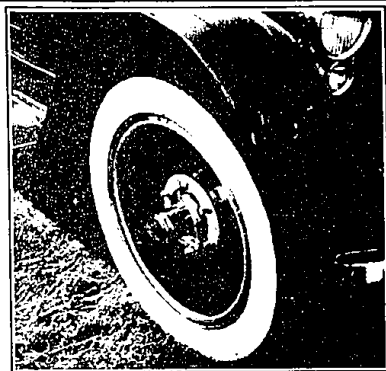
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