

THEATER

SRO's 'Greater Tuna' hilarious must see show

SRO Productions presents "Greater Tuna" 8 p.m. Fridays Aug. 1 and 8 and Saturdays Aug. 2, and 9, and 2 p.m. Sundays Aug. 3 and 10 at Southfield's Theburgh on northeast corner of Civic Center Drive and Berg Road. Tickets are \$8 adults, \$7 seniors/children. Call (248) 827-0700.

By Don Weibel
SPECIAL WRITER

Alan Madeleine and Frank Markus are in top form in SRO's hilariously-splendid production of "Greater Tuna." The play had a brief off-Broadway run in 1982-83 and has been popular with regional and summer theater audiences, as it provides a performing tour de force for actors.

Madeleine and Markus rarely miss a beat or an opportunity to score. Each plays 10 characters from the west Texas town of Tuna, total population of 20. Each seems more bizarre than the previous one. Yet, they never go overboard when playing women, by becoming too campy. And as they switch back and forth between roles, they retain the small character details that make their performances so satisfying.

Tuna, a dusty, wide spot in the road, has a radio station. Unlikely for sure, but playwright, Jason Williams, uses the station as a comic device to take an affectionate, yet critical view of small-town America. Williams builds his story around the broadcasters and the screwball people and events they talk about.

Williams cleverly gives the station the call letters of OKKK, since some viewpoints are openly prejudice. Luckily, the transmitter only puts out 275 watts. We find that the town has an unsettling degree of hypocrisy, deviousness and far-out right wing ideology, and just plain ignorance. At one point a character



In the act: Alan Madeleine of Beverly Hills, (left) and Frank Markus in "Greater Tuna."

asks a reporter what magazine he works for. He responds, "Intelligence" magazine. The

character says, "oh, I don't believe we have that in Tuna."

When we first meet Messrs Madeleine and Markus, they are reporting folksy, small town news: the farm report, winning papers in school, etc. Markus, who by the way is technical director for "Car and Driver" magazine, slips off and changes into Didi Smokey doing a ludicrous gun commercial: "if our guns can't kill it, it's immortal." Madeleine is excellent as, Bertha, who leads the Smut Snatchers in removing books from the library. She has three part-time kids- all played by Markus in a distinct manner. The most interesting perhaps is an overweight Charlene, desperate to be a cheerleader. The wig and padded pants were alone worth the price of admission.

Madeleine is as excellent as Leonard, a talk show host- as Pearl Burras, a senior citizen bent over and walking with a cane, but capable of killing a dog or her husband ("I told you I'd

sing over your grave. I feel a song coming on."); and again as the bible pounding, Reverend Spikes. Dressed in a tuxedo off-white suit, the preacher man delivers an eulogy consisting entirely of every tired worn-out cliché known to mankind. It is a very funny five minutes.

Some of Markus' best moments include, Fely Fisk, as a humane society weirdo (his hat says, "Save The Snails"); Phinias Blye, a perpetual city council candidate- and Vera Carp, a blonde busy-body. Markus, originally from Memphis, has a natural Southern accent with savvy phrasing that makes his charac-

ters most believable. Kudos to dressers (Tom Smith and Janet Ginis) who made the many costume changes. The incidental country music was tasteful and complimented the show. Director Judi Rosati's staging provides a fresh, lively pacing that's a joy to behold. "Greater Tuna" is a must see show.

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