

THEATER

Meadow Brook wrings emotional nuances from Albee's memory play

"Three Tall Women," a play in two acts by Edward Albee at Meadow Brook Theatre, Wilson Hall on the campus of Oakland University, Rochester Hills. Through Nov. 16 - 8 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday; 2 p.m. Wednesday; 2 p.m. & 8 p.m. Saturday; 2 p.m. & 6:30 p.m. Sunday. Tickets: \$18-\$32; (248) 377-3300 or (248) 645-6666.

By FRANK PROVENZANO
STAFF WRITER

Like most of his dense dramas with nimble linguistics and raw theatrics, Edward Albee's play, "Three Tall Women," creates a floating memory where the memories of three women become intertwined with the omniscience of death.

Performing Albee's work is far from an easy task. He offers a vocabulary of motives in the sub-

text, and a lexicon of symbols in the simplest details. The trap is either to consider his work as too superficial, or go too deep to find the dramatic truths of his work.

Displaying a deft touch not to overplay the psychological nuances, director Geoffrey Sherman has managed to wring the subtle details of Albee's emotional confession reportedly written to "find peace" after years of alienation from his mother. Considering the surrealistic and sometimes preachy tone of the play, Sherman can claim to have gone where few have trekked.

The two-act play is set in the plush bedroom of a 92-year-old (or is she only 91?) character simply named, "A." In the first act, she's joined by a 62-year-old caretaker, "B," and "C," a brash 26-year-old upstart from the law firm that handles the older

woman's legal affairs.

The understated conflict exists among the cynical older woman and the idealistic young pro on a mission; and, the elderly woman and her fading memories of her ostracized son.

Of course, side bets are taken on whether the acid-tongued geriatric will make it to the bathroom or simply "make it" in her panties.

At the end of the act, the comatose "A" presents an intriguing dilemma: Can the play go on without dialogue including the lead character?

From the onset, Diana Van Fossen, who plays "B," hits her middle-age melancholic stride. She carries herself with the ambivalence of duty, pride and wishing to be someone else other than wiping up after her loose-bowels client.

Clearly, the onus of the drama is on "A," played by Avril Gentles. Other than Beckett, few other playwrights would simply present a character with so many lines. No doubt Gentles has the one of the difficult roles written for an older actor in recent theater history.

She must alternately sound lucid and a rant like a lunatic about whether she's "remembering what I remember." Gentles should win applause for maintaining the pace, tenor and heart of the play. Her presence alongside the matronly Van Fossen and the attractive, mid-20s Fiona Davis as "C" is a stark reminder of the inevitable stages of life.

In act two, the dilemma of "What to do with the comatose

lead?" is answered. Each woman has been transformed into "A" at different stages of her life. The result is a memory play that offers a psychological drama of three sides of one woman, who went from uncompromising innocence to middle-age resentment to the painful resignation of living with regrets.

By the second act, Davis is freed from the shallow insensitivity of her act-one character. She demonstrates a broader range of feelings as the vulnerable and indoctrinated mistress at the threshold of a life of promise and remorse. And Van Fossen shines in her retellings of the circumstances that have led her to middle-age despair.

In its finest moments when "A," "B" and "C" land the same psychological plane, "Three Tall

Women" sings with the beautiful agony of Albee's existential outlook. Perhaps that's what the 1994 Pulitzer Prize committee realized when "Three Tall Women" was awarded best play. Self-deceptions and self-denial may have been coping mechanisms before the curtain is raised on "A," but under Albee's spell and Sherman's directorial precision, delusions are rubbed away with stark clarity.

For anyone contemplating how a fading memory complicates the notion of a meaningful life, Meadow Brook's "Three Tall Women" provides a reminder.

Remembering the memories of one's life may be all there is. Life is but a stage. After all, if that revelation resounds in theatre, it'll likely play a role in the world off stage.

ON STAGE

Theater fans have lots of choices this weekend. Here are some highlights of what's on stage this weekend.

WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY STUDIO THEATRE

Daniel Howard of Bloomfield Township appears in "A Woman Called Truth," by Sandra Fenichel to be presented at Wayne State University's Studio Theatre Thursday, Oct. 30 through Sunday, Nov. 2.

Second year Bonstelle Company member Elveria Buford brings Sojourner Truth to life and tells her story in celebration of the 200th anniversary of her birth.

Truth's journey from slave to respected abolitionist and women's rights advocate is chronicled in this moving drama.

After her fight to gain her freedom, Truth started a fight to gain rights for all women. In addition to her participation in women's rights, she started the

Splendid cast offers 'A View From the Bridge'

Schoolcraft College presents "A View From the Bridge," by Arthur Miller, dinner theater performances 8 p.m. Friday, Oct. 31-Saturday, Nov. 1 (\$19), theater only Friday, Nov. 7-Saturday, Nov. 8 (\$8), Liberal Arts Theatre at the college, 18600 Haggerty Road (between Six and Seven Mile roads), Livonia, (313) 462-4409.

By BOB WEIBEL
SPECIAL WRITER

As the lights dimmed on the final scene of Schoolcraft College's "A View From the Bridge," one could sense a collective "wow!" from the audience. Indeed, a few were audible in the moment they recovered from the tragic ending, and began applauding the splendid performers.

Playwright Arthur Miller, as in many other works, deals with family strife and man's attempt to secure his "rightful" place in society. In this play, a man is propelled to self-destruction by an awesome passion he barely comprehends.

Miller employs a narrator - a lawyer named Alfieri - to define and clarify the story. Though originally written for a male in 1955, Kathryn Cobelloigh is convincing as "Mrs. Alfieri. Cobelloigh speaks with the compassion of a neighborhood attorney, and with the wisdom of a philosopher when she steps out her role to comment on the story.

The focus of the play is Eddie Carbone, a longshoreman in Brooklyn. If you recall the movie, "On the Waterfront," you get the picture. Brooklyn used to be governed according to an Old World Sicilian code and the likes of Al Capone.

"But now we are quite civilized, quite American. Now we settle for half and like it better," said Alfieri. The point: A successful society depends on compromise. Intelligent individuals learn to sublimate certain desires.

Brian Taylor as Eddie Carbone is a compelling tragic figure who cannot compromise, and never gains insight into what is driving him toward catastrophe. He slowly changes from a loving husband who has raised his niece, Catherine - to a raging madman. Liz Ebersole does a fine job in the role of Catherine.

battle to gain land grants for former slaves from the government because it was their unpaid labor which had been a stepping stone to the nation's financial success.

The Studio Theatre is at the corner of Cass and Hancock, downstairs at the Hilberry. Tickets range from \$5 to \$7, call (313) 677-2950 Monday-Saturday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Purchasing a ticket to this play will entitle you to special student discounts at two other Wayne State Theatre plays this

season, "Othello," at the Hilberry through Dec. 17 and "Flyin' West" at the Bonstelle (Jan. 30 to Feb. 1).

FARMINGTON PLAYERS

Farmington Players begins its 1997-98 season 8 p.m. Friday with "Sylvia" an adult comedy by A.R. Gurney at the Players Barn, 32332 W. 12 Mile Road (1/2 mile west of Orchard Lake Road), Farmington Hills. Performances 8 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 1; 2 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 2, 9 and 16; 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, Nov. 7-8,

Nov. 14-15; and Thursday-Saturday, Nov. 20-22. Tickets are \$8, call (248) 653-2955.

"Sylvia" is the story of mid-life empty nesters Greg and Kate who move to Manhattan after 22 years in the suburbs. Greg's career is winding down, while Kate's is taking off. Then Greg finds a Poodle/Lab mutt in the park. Sylvia, the dog, offers Greg an escape from the real world, but Kate sees her as a rival for Greg's affection. The marriage seems doomed until a series of hilarious and touching complica-

tions help Greg and Kate learn to compromise, and Sylvia becomes a valued part of their lives.

FIRST THEATRE GUILD

First Theatre Guild presents "Hansel and Gretel," performed by a cast of 25 area children ages 16 and younger, beginning 8 p.m. Friday, Oct. 31 in Knox Auditorium at First Presbyterian Church, on Maple Road just east of Cranbrook. Other performances take place 2 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, Nov. 1-2; 2 p.m.

Sunday, Nov. 9; and 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, Nov. 7-9.

Saturday, Nov. 1 is Senior Citizen Day. All senior citizens will see the show for free. The cost for all other performances is \$5 per person. Call (248) 642-6712 for tickets.

The parts of Hansel and Gretel will be played by Billy Dixon of Madison Heights and Pam Miller of Birmingham. Andrea Cook of Beverly Hills is the witch.

control

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