

## THEATER

## Village Players put heart into 'Fiddler on the Roof'

Village Players of Birmingham presents "Fiddler on the Roof," March 19-21 and 26-27. Performances 8 p.m. Fridays-Saturdays and 2 p.m. Sundays, at the playhouse, 752 Chestnut, Birmingham. Tickets \$14, call (248) 644-2075.

BY MARY JANE DOERR  
SPECIAL WRITER

As far as musicals go, the Village Players seems to have become enamored with the creative team of Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick this year.

Last fall they produced a light-hearted "She Loves Me." Now the company is presenting a heart-felt production of "Fiddler on the Roof."

Keeping the fiddler on the roof is a delicate show biz balance between the harsh realities of the show and its romantic sentiment.

Director Barbara Anna Gowans dwells on the personal relationships of the four love stories, down playing the cruel scenes between the soldiers and the Anatevka Jews.

The show centers on the families and not as much on the volatile politics of 1905 Russia.

There is little thrown around by the Russian soldiers during the ransacking scene that breaks up the wedding dancing, and few actions to physically create the reality of the coming Revolution, just a real sense of warmth between the couples.

Perhaps, it is because Gowans has cast vibrant young actors and actresses to play Tzeitel and Motel, Hodel and Perchik, and Chava and Fyedka.

Concetta La Macchia (Tzeitel), Rachel Cantor (Hodel), and Courtney Thomasma (Chava) quickly win over audiences in their harmonious "Matchmaker." Later, Rachel Cantor sings a beautiful "Far From the Home I Love" turning what has to be one of the most heart wrenching scenes in all musical theatre into an understanding of the depth of love. Her fiancé, Perchik, is portrayed by a convincing Eliot Bernstein. Together they elicit a "made for each other" impression.

The other couples has the same appeal. Courtney Thomasma is a soft Chava that matches up with Joey Bybee as Fyedka.

Concetta La Macchia is well paired with Nate Topie as Motel.

Topie has bright appeal in "Miracle of Miracles."

Even though her matching proved fruitless regarding these three couples who marry for love, Diane D'Agostino as Yente, the Matchmaker, is a penetrating character with her dominate and clear voice. Barry V. Levine has the same ability with a pronounced and humorous Rabbi. George D. Cirilli's Lazar Wolf, the butcher, makes its hard to understand why Tzeitel turns him down.

Cirilli handles the bar room scene and the wedding scene with a sense of humorous timing. Both scenes are enhanced by Debra Bernstein-Siegel's simple but appropriate choreography, especially in the bottle dance which the moveable set design leaves as much stage space as possible.

Liz Walters has the difficult part of playing Golde and she does it with a strong voice singing "Sunrise Sunset." Her Golde is a softer one than we are used to, in keeping with tone of this production. One of the best scenes in the show is the dream scene with Ann Stevenson as

Grandma Tzeitel and the chorus. The nine member orchestra supports well from the back of stage pit. Good placement for the sound.

Walter's role is made even more difficult because she must play opposite the inimitable Dan Castle. More than anything this show belongs to Dan Castle who plays and sings Teyve with a very fine voice. "This time Castle has traded his traditional comedy for a no adlib, no shenanigans, no fiddling around role. From time to time, Castle throws a few sideways glances at the audience, drawing more humor out of the lines, but it is never out of keeping with the role or out of place. Perhaps "If I were a Rich Man" is a little low for his range but the later songs bring out a lovely richness. He plays the very kindly Teyve whose musings with God reflect our questions about life but with a kindly attitude toward his daughters.

With his humor and warmth as Teyve, his style of interaction with the daughters and Golde, more than anything else, Castle keeps this fiddler fiddling on the roof.



Loving couple: Dan Castle (Teyve) and Liz Walters (Golde) in a scene from the Village Players production of "Fiddler on the Roof."

Grace and Gloria: Gloria, Elizabeth Bradford of Plymouth (left) and Grace, Laura Gumina of Redford, play two women from opposite backgrounds who struggle with issues of living and dying.



## Trinity House tackles tough issues

Trinity House Theatre presents Tom Ziegler's "Grace and Gloria" 8 p.m. Fridays-Saturdays and 2 p.m. Sundays through March 28 at the theater, 38840 West Six Mile, west of I-275, Livonia. Some adult language. Tickets are \$10, \$8 for groups of 10 or more, (734) 464-6302.

BY SUE SUCETTA  
SPECIAL WRITER

Trinity House Theatre's touching and heartwarming production of "Grace and Gloria" has the potential to be their sleeper hit of the season. Don't be scared off by being a play about death: the dialogue-driven play is more about life and the choices one makes. Director Trudy Mason has been blessed with a strong, believable cast, a compelling script and a talented technical team. "Grace and Gloria" is community theater at its finest.

Gloria is an agnostic, Harvard-bred New York business woman turned hospice volunteer, whose lawyer husband relocated them to the laid-back pace of Appalachia after the devastating loss of their 12-year-old son in a car accident.

Grace is a simple yet profound Appalachian woman who has outlived her husband and five

sons, never traveled more than 60 miles from her home, and is unable to read. However, her profound faith and her simple yet remarkably insightful observations about life allow Grace to help Gloria confront the understand her own personal demons.

Elizabeth Ladd Lee of Hazel Park plays the efficient yet insecure Gloria with her heart on her well-tailored sleeve. Although Gloria tries to maintain the aloof, detached composure she developed as a business woman, she ends up receiving more from Grace than she could have possibly imagined. Lee plays the role with both nervous energy and gentle compassion. Impeccably costumed and made up, she's both likable and annoying, and convincingly real.

Laura Gumina of Redford is outstanding in the role of Grace, weary yet regal, a queen holding court in her small Appalachian cabin with a homemade quilt as her mantle and Walkman headphones as her crown. A fall and a broken hip led her to the unexpected discovery of cancer, and she has come home to spend her last few days in her rustic cabin to escape the antiseptic smell of the hospital and its well-meaning but condescending staff.

The chemistry between Lee and Gumina cements the strength of the budding relationship and provokes the liveliest dialogue. Grace brings Gloria down to reality by reminding her that "Glorie, honey, you didn't come here to see me through this, you came here to see me die."

As Gloria helps Grace with her physical needs, Grace helps Gloria deal with her emotional conflicts, reminding her that "each life is like one stitch in a sweater. If one stitch is gone, the whole thing is gone."

The set is a homey and comfortable rustic cabin with a working pump sink, an offstage oven that billows smoke when Gloria forgets to open the flue, and amazing attention to details through the props.

The sound effects are a major component of the play, as they create the realistic backdrop of encroaching bulldozers eager to level Grace's beloved farm.

## Theatre Guild's 'Little Foxes' is a well-cast production

Theatre Guild of Livonia-Redford presents Lillian Hellman's "The Little Foxes," March 19-21, 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, 2 p.m. Sunday, at the theater, 15138 Beach Drive, south of Five Mile, Redford. Tickets: \$10, \$9 seniors/students, call (313) 531-0554.

BY MAGGIE BOLEY  
SPECIAL WRITER

Greed, lies and warped family values. No, not 1999, but 1900 is the setting for Lillian Hellman's unsettling play "The Little Foxes." Presented by The Theatre Guild of Livonia-Redford, under the direction of Cranbrook graduate Peter Sonenberg, the turn of the 20th century set is a delight as we turn to the 21st century.

The set showed great care and attention to details such as the pitcher and wash basin as well as period photographs hanging on the walls.

The costumes are equally imaginative, with cast members working with Sonenberg to create their outfits. A feathered pink dress worn in the first scene is a real eye popper.

The cast members are all seasoned community theater performers, and were well cast in

their roles.

Annette Hissong as Addie the maid presented a solid performance as one of the few wholesome characters in this play. Morris Goodman, an attorney by day, was convincing as Cal the butler. Connie Fox, in the role of Birdie Hubbard, was very believable as the sad captive of her abusive husband Oscar Hubbard, played to perfection by theater veteran Thom Hinks. Hinks has a fine voice, and puts it to good use on stage as well as lending his time as a reader for the Detroit Radio Information service (a reading service for the blind). Hinks also serves as an Audio Describer for blind patrons at Meadowbrook Theatre.

Joshua Ebi, in a marked contrast to his previous roles as Tiny Tim and Linus, was able to pull off the role of young wastrel Leo Hubbard quite well. The role of William Marshall, unsuspecting business partner of the Hubbard family, was well played by Dennis Day. Jeff Bartos is marvelous as Benjamin Hubbard, brother of Oscar. He has the smiling Southern civility routine that barely disguises hostility down pat.

Kristen Mudge as Alexandra Giddens, portrays a young

"Steel Magnolia" type, the only who has the gumption to stand up to the whole dysfunctional Hubbard family. Mudge works at Hancock Fabrics and put together very attractive costumes for her character.

Matt Eskola, in the role of Horace Giddens, Alexandra's father, a true Southern gentleman in very poor health. His make-up and demeanor was quite convincing.

But, Lorretta Wilson, as Regina Giddens (nee Hubbard), was the show stopper in both costume and character. Sister and business partner of Oscar and Benjamin, she is a Gibson Girl gone gonzo with greed. The twisted family and business relationships all center around this grasping character. Whether she's leaving her ailing husband, Horace, to flounder on the stairs, or is flirting with William Marshall, Regina Giddens is always impeccably dressed and the clear matriarch of this scheming family. The complex relationships of the entire cast are a real treat to see.

To paraphrase a line from the play: "There are those who act upon a stage, and those of us who watch them."

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