

# Emotional play holds attention

Because of mechanical problems, a portion of the following review was omitted in the Feb. 5 issue. The review is being repeated in its entirety.

By BARBARA MICHALS

Supercharged emotions prevail in "The Runner Stumbles" when a young priest falls in love with a nun and later stands trial for their murder. As currently presented by the Farmington Players, the Milan Stitt drama is well-acted and engrossing.

Further performances are scheduled for 8:30 p.m. Thursday-Sunday and Feb. 19-21 at the Farmington Players' Barn Theater.

Based on a true story, "The Runner Stumbles" takes place in 1911 in Solon, a remote small town in the Upper Peninsula that is openly hostile to Catholics.

Father Rivard (Dale Feldpausch) has been sent to this small quiet parish to finish the book he is writing. The move also was made to remove the eager young priest from being a thorn in the side of his superiors.

SISTER RITA (Yvonne Golomb) is the young nun assigned to assist Father Rivard when his two teaching nuns become ill. Right from the start there is electricity between the two as they clash on religious doctrine and their perceptions of their duties. Mrs. Shandig (Kathleen Monticello), Rivard's housekeeper, senses that trouble lies ahead.

## review

Feldpausch does a fine job of making Father Rivard's anguish physically visible as he sits in jail awaiting his trial. Relaying his version of events to his lawyer is painful because it compels him to confront emotions he has been running from for the last four years.

There are few playwrights more prolific than Neil Simon. But even Simon could miss the mark. With actors untrained to his rhythm, he could be stale and lifeless. Happily, the Avon Players cast of his autobiographical "Chapter Two" did not cause him to suffer this misfortune.

The play deals with a transitional period in Simon's life when he had to come to terms with his wife's death and allow himself to love again. The production continues Friday and Sunday and Feb. 20-21.

The play is expertly cast managed to deliver Simon's clipped, pat, almost-housekeeper, senses that trouble lies ahead. The production continues Friday and Sunday and Feb. 20-21.

Feldpausch also forcefully conveys the young priest's fiery temper.

Mrs. Golomb is convincing as Sister Rita, who prefers to think of herself as a person who is a nun rather than as a nun who once was a person. Her youthful enthusiasm and resilience help her cope with Father Rivard's many early rebuffs.

As Mrs. Shandig, Kathleen Monticello is outstanding. Following an unhappy marriage, Mrs. Shandig converted to Catholicism and found a haven with the Church and Father Rivard. She

idolizes the young priest, and her possessiveness towards him brings inevitable dissatisfaction as Sister Rita's presence is felt more and more in her lives.

In supporting roles, Shari Douglas and Ed Keller do especially good work. Ms. Douglas plays Erna Prindle, a plain-looking spinster who feels guilty about deserting the Church to find a husband. Her torment and confusion on the witness stand are beautifully handled.

KELLER IS highly convincing as

Toby Felker, the small-town lawyer appointed to defend Father Rivard. Though Felker is far from young, this is his first real courtroom case, and his homespun good sense and low-key approach are immensely appealing.

In smaller roles, Phil Hadley as the country bumpkin Amos and Deb Kembell as the jealous schoolgirl Louise seem well-cast. That is not the case with Doug Buckley as the prosecutor and Bob McKeever as Monsignor Nicholson; both are rather wooden.

Despite the generally good performance

director John Powers has elicited from his cast, the pacing in "The Runner Stumbles" is distressingly lead-footed, especially in the first act. The main problem is the many flashbacks required as Father Rivard tells his story.

A solution to the many slow scene shifts would be to have both past and present on stage simultaneously, letting the spotlights shift the action. The small stage might be a bit cramped, but the play would flow smoother and the emotional tension would be better sustained.

## 'Chapter Two' handled brightly

By GAY ZIEGER

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## review

of the audience obscured a bon mot. But the general high spirits were such that no one particularly cared. Except for a few lengthy and slightly draggy serious moments of self-revelation, the evening was pure fun.

WITH SIMON, as with any writer of humor, it is a question of delivery. He is unrelenting in his demand for exquisite timing, pacing, inflection, for proper stance, head movement and gestures.

Sue Warner as Faye is a master at

this. She combined many of the Rose Marie, Nancy Walker, Martha Raye qualities that make these stars individual successes. She must either be a native or a student of New York.

She knows hard, slightly sarcastic, self-deprecating wit. Her whole body and manner reflected that. She was the comedic highlight of the play.

The star, Laurie Johnson, while also adept at conveying humor, was much more persuasive and even likable as woman wronged. Her anger was vibrant. The audience understood her frustration at being No. 2 to the writer in intelligence and sarcasm, especially when he used these as weapons against her. We wanted her to persevere.

Leo, the playwright's match-making brother, played by Jim Warner, was

generally hysterical. He has the knock-out, drag-out instinct of a fighter and he knows the proper moment for using it. He drills away without pause. Give him an opening and he'll hammer his humor home.

THE PLAYWRIGHT himself, played by Edward Duke, is slightly stiff, rather conservative and almost always

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