

Everything's against this show succeeding



Grace Alexandra Aiello plays young Gloria and Bethany Carpenter stars as a blind woman who is terrorized by criminals in the Meadow Brook Theatre production of "Wait Until Dark."

The suspense-thriller "Wait Until Dark" continues through April 18 at Meadow Brook Theatre on the Oakland University campus near Rochester. Performances are at 8:30 p.m. Tuesdays-Fridays, 6 and 9:30 p.m. Saturdays, 6:30 p.m. Sundays and 2 p.m. Wednesdays. For tickets call the box office at 370-3000.

By Helen Zucker
special writer

Meadow Brook Theatre's production of Frederick Knott's thriller "Wait Until Dark" is strangely lame. Directed with great uncertainty by Terence Kilburn, the cast does everything it can to reveal the script's inherent plot weaknesses. Even the set seems to work against the script. The basement apartment in Greenwich Village where a blind girl gets the upper hand over three criminals is so cluttered, so filled with chairs and hassocks and small objects to trip over — not to mention four rugs — I had trouble believing a blind person could maneuver around this room, let alone manager to stab a murderer. The telephone, a crucial, much-used instrument, sits on the kitchen table sans a connecting wire. (Elaine Morse, sitting beside me, spent 10 minutes speculating on the possibility of a phone jack installed in the base of the table.) If the production had been riveting, no one would have cared where or even if the jack was installed. But the first act is so slow, and the actors so ambivalent that the mind wanders and one starts examining the set.

THE CAST seems to find this thriller hilarious, and they have trouble deciding when to be terrifying and when to be funny. The end product is neither a spoof on thrillers or a really scary evening. It's a hash of genres. Will Love is unconvincing as Mike, the common thief. Love is much more believable as a gentleman. I didn't believe Love had spent a day in jail, let alone a lifetime as a petty crook.

review

Love throws himself into the part of Sam Hendrix's fictional friend, and it's easy to forget that he doesn't know Sam at all. Love is a sincere fraud and a fake thief. It's supposed to be the other way around.

Phillip Locker as Sgt. Carlino is believable as the dumb crook and totally unbelievable as a Massachusetts police officer. It's not Locker's "Guy and Dolls" accent — all those "lesses and doses" that's so cockeyed, it's the sight of a jailbird who can't add suddenly remembering tons of information, long telephone numbers and whipping up the ability to think on his feet.

John LaGiola, who displays a wonderful Italian accent whenever he gets on the telephone, isn't really scary as Harry Roat, Jr. Roat is the key to this play. He's not simply a murderer looking for a doll containing heroin, he's a demented sadist, his mind wheels in dark ways.

A CONTEST between the likes of Roat and a vulnerable blind girl should throw the audience into a panic. Roat should be evil incarnate, a streak of lean meanness.

La Giola is fitfully threatening, especially at the finale, and occasionally so genial we forget he's a killer. Bethany Carpenter as "the super blind woman" does her best to generate a bit of tension, but it's clear at the outset that the three underheads are no match for her.

Andrew Barnicle as Sam Hendrix, loving "perfectionist" husband, seems a bit added. I don't blame him. As straight man, Barnicle is called on to play a photographer who is stupid enough to barge off to New Jersey the day after a fake client hasn't shown up and a woman has been murdered in the neighborhood. We hope Sam gets home safely so that blind Suzy can take care of him.

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