

# Comedy is strong in 'Rose Tattoo'

Performances of the Meadow Brook Theatre production of "The Rose Tattoo" by Tennessee Williams continue through Sunday, Jan. 25, on the Oakland University campus in Rochester Hills. For ticket information, call the box office at 377-3300.

By Cathie Breidenbach  
special writer

Director Charles Nolte deftly sidesteps the trap in Tennessee Williams' drama "The Rose Tattoo" and presents a balanced and wonderfully funny production.

True, "Tattoo" is a passionate, lusty drama about love, grief and the sexual renaissance of Serafina Dele Rose. The potential trap in all the hot-blooded, arm-waving Sicilian emotion at the center of the play is to go for passion and downplay the brilliant, touching comedy Tennessee Williams wrote into "Tattoo."

With Jayne Houdyshell in the lead, Nolte has an actress strong enough to pull off the drama and to do magnificent things with the comedy. Henry J. Jordan plays the muscled-bound Italian truckdriver who woos Serafina. When the two get together, the play truly comes alive with a funny, tough electricity only two virtuoso players could generate.

Scenes in the first act explain the violent death of Serafina's husband four years earlier and her devotion to his idealized memory, but the play really begins when Alvaro drives his truckful of bananas into Serafina's life.

"TATTOO" IS SET in a little town somewhere on the Gulf coast between Mobile and New Orleans, in a house created by set designer Peter Hicks, with his usual attention to detail. First impression is that "Rose" might as well be set in Sicily. Why then does Williams put in Le Sirego, the witchy, non-Italian neighbor who



**Cathie Breidenbach**

spies on Serafina and periodically joins in a melee of screaming children and black-garbed Sicilian matrons who run round Serafina's house chasing a runaway goat, a chase reminiscent of a scene from a Laurel and Hardy movie?

After every sooty outburst from the Italians, Le Sirego appears with her grey hair flying to kreen, "The crazy Wops are at it again." Evelyn Orbach plays Le Sirego for its comic potential and clearly shows the cultural contrast Williams intended.

William Turrentine plays another non-Italian, Jack Hunter, a mild-mannered, young sailor who falls for Serafina's 13-year-old daughter, Rosa (Shirley Ann Kujala). He's overwhelmed by Rosa's unbridled passion and by the torrent of emotionalism of her household.

Compared to the rich, funny and touching honesty of Serafina's romance with Alvaro, the love between Rosa and Jack seems sweet but callow.

WILLIAMS HAS a fetish for hav-

ing his players wear underwear — women in slips and men in their undershirts — presumably because it's steamy down South and the weather reflects characters' equally steamy passions.

Elizabeth Taylor as Maggie in "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" may have looked silly in a slip, but Williams would have done Houdyshell a favor if he'd let Serafina get dressed more often. Alvaro, on the other hand, looks splendid in his undershirt — so did Marion Brando as Stanley in "Streetcar Named Desire." On second thought, maybe Williams had something with his underwear fetish.

Divina Cook and Phillip Locker give fine supporting performances as Assunta and as the most obnoxious traveling salesman imaginable.

Cathie Breidenbach of West Bloomfield has always loved theater. A former high-school English teacher, she works in public relations, advertising and as a freelance writer.

# Young performer grows up on stage

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Turner has been studying and teaching drama since she was a youngster. At the age of 13, she told George Roeper that she wanted to go to his school. He hired her as drama teacher for the lower school, and she taught drama in exchange for tuition. The third year, she got a free scholarship and graduated a year early.

An interesting sidelight: "My mother had started the theater department at Roeper but quit because she was pregnant with me."

After graduation, Turner was accepted as a student by three drama schools in London and was planning to attend one on an overseas grant, when the school realized that she wasn't 18 yet and was underage for the grant.

SHE PUT HER studies on hold but eventually decided to study in the United States. She was accepted by Julliard, the North Carolina School for the Arts and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

"UWM was the school I really wanted to go to. It has emphasis on voice, speech and movement." She wanted to concentrate on an actor's technical abilities — with the same attention to technique as when she studied violin for 12 years.

She was 18 when she got in, the youngest student there at that time. The rest of the students were 23-35. (Her roommate was 19-year-old Lindsey Frost, who now plays Betsy on "As the World Turns.") She

received her bachelor of fine arts and master of fine arts equivalent in 1984.

Turner said she still owes \$22,000 for her schooling. She earned \$8,000 in December working as a carriage driver in New York's Central Park but describes this as a harrowing experience she wouldn't want to continue.

While at UWM, she worked as the speech teacher's assistant. The head of Julliard contacted her school and she was recommended when the American Academy of Dramatic Arts was looking for a speech teacher. She taught at the academy for about nine months. "I discovered teaching wasn't what I want to do," she said.

But she does have a special interest in speech training. "It's the biggest key to doing what the playwright wrote," she said.

FROM THE YEARS up to when she first went away to college, Turner was definitely overweight. "I'm five foot three and I weighed 180 pounds in college," she said.

"They hired me with the idea of doing a lot of character roles." But during one summer at home, she decided to slim down and lost 69 pounds. When she went back to school, "It was quite a shock to them."

She still played the character roles. "They picked me and gave me wings," Turner said. "All my life I wanted to play an ingenue. I always played bawdy women, even for my mother."

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