

## He's not like characters he portrays

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The actor, who was born in Brooklyn and went to school at Brown University, said he knows, "I look like a blue-collar worker. Remember, Joe (of "Rhoda") used to demolish buildings."

More recently, other TV roles Groh played include an art dealer in the movie "A Broken Vow," and some guest shots. He also did four or five off-Broadway plays.

Now, he said, he's going back home, to Westport, to be married. His wedding date and birthday are coming up on the same day: May 21. His fiancée, Karla, is planning the wedding and looking for a house for them.

Groh said, "I just sold my house on three prime acres in Westport." He would like to find a true colonial, an 18th-century saltbox. "I might get us a house and have it moved."

# Actors can't save playwright's script

Performances of "Philemon" by Tom Jones and Harvey Schmidt continue through Saturday at Lawrence Institute of Technology in Southfield. For ticket information, call 469-7548 during business hours.

The Main Stage Theatre Guild production of "Philemon," directed by C.J. Nodus, is well-intentioned. But the script is such a sorry affair that no amount of good intentions can pull this play out of the fire.

It's difficult to believe that "Philemon" was written by Tom Jones and Harvey Schmidt, the duo who gave us the charming "Fantasticks" and "I Do! I Do!" Jones and Schmidt should put on their ruby red slippers, clap their feet together three times, and return home to the 20th century.

In "Philemon," Jones and Schmidt have meandered back in time to ancient Rome to recreate the Passion play. It takes real passion to do the Passion of Christ. This version of the story based (very loosely) on the legend of Philo Judeus, a philosopher



**Helen Zucker**

from Alexandria, circa 30 B.C., lacks credibility as well as sense.

The flat script gives us a street clown named Cockkan who practices pimping, extortion and protection rackets as a sideline. Cockkan is despairingly played by Mel Janney. In justice, I fail to see how else Janney could have played Cockkan. A thug who turns into a hit man and then into Jesus Christ is an impossible role.

I COULD SEE the transformation coming before Conrad Humphrey, as commander of the Roman legions, asks Cockkan to go to jail as a "special prisoner" to find the leaders of the new Christian movement. Humphrey is a good-looking, tall, young man with a nice voice. I hope he is better cast in his next venture.

Christopher McKenna, a healthy, earnest young lad, plays his heart out as Andos, the 18-year-old believer who has sons or a pregnant wife at varying times. Andos is starved and beaten as Philemon's assistant, and it's difficult to look at McKenna, a Norman Rockwell picture of health and think about suffering martyrs.

Andos is responsible for Cockkan's transformation into Christ since he reminds Cockkan of the newborn son he lost.

The songs are so prosy that it's difficult to know why pretty Anne Dwyer throws herself into the part

of Kiki, the whore/clown, or why Sarah Porets wastes her sweet voice on the part of Marsyas, the sexy cellmate, or why Claudia Rogers reads maudlin letters as the Wife (of anyone, apparently).

And I confess I groaned when Ed Diner, playing Servillus, says seriously as he whips Cockkan and then knifes him to death: "I was just doing my job."

The only thing I learned was that Diner's line went back to 30 B.C. (I thought we'd heard it too often). Linda Jaynes' interesting collection of

Mosaic robes would have been displayed to better advantage on the walls of a museum.

May the Main Stage Theatre Guild, who gave us a smashing "The Gin Game" this season, give us the productions they're capable of, next season. Amen.

Helen Zucker has many years experience reviewing for newspapers and magazines in Michigan, New York and Massachusetts.

## table talk

### Dine, wine

Stephen A. Girard, Jr., president of Girard Winery in California's Napa Valley, chatted individually with guests during the Winemakers Dinner on Tuesday at Sebastian's Restaurant/Bar in Somerset Mall. Troy Girard provided all the wines, with the exception of the desert wine. Girard produces some 16,000 cases of wine a year, in the \$12 price range. Courses at the gourmet dinner included Peanut Barbecued Chicken with Jerusalem Artichoke Cakes; Asparagus and Carrot Timbales with Roasted Red Pepper, Herb Mayonnaise and Marinated Vegetables; Cornmeal Blinis with Smoked Sturgeon and Caviar; Grilled Breast of Duck with Log Confit served with Wild Mushrooms and Peach Glaze; St. Andree, Brie and Triple Bleu cheeses served with Fresh Fruits; and Plum Napoleon with Sabayan.

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