

'Damien' exceptional show

Performances of the Trinity House Theatre production of "Damien" continue through Dec. 27 at Trinity House in Livonia. For ticket information call 464-8302.

By Roy Goodman
SPECIAL WRITER
The story of Father Damien DeVuster is familiar, yet it seems an unlikely source for a play. This is the story that Trinity House Theatre has chosen to present, with Jeffrey Hedeon as the sole actor in Aldyth Morris's script.

A play with only one actor must be difficult enough to construct, and Morris chose a most unusual framework for hers. It is 1936, and DeVuster's body has just been disinterred from the cemetery in the leper colony on Molokai. As the body is transported back to his homeland of Belgium for a hero's burial, DeVuster reminisces from beyond the grave.

The playwright, the actor, and director Sarah Hedeon have all made their material work. At first a bit skeptical and confused, the audience is quickly drawn into the story of Damien DeVuster's life and work.

Since he gave up many of his rights, much of his contact with the outside world, and eventually his health, and his life work with a colony of lepers — all of them

diseased and dying, many horribly disfigured — it's easy to think of DeVuster as an almost impossible saint.

But in Jeffrey Hedeon's hands, DeVuster becomes a fully dimensional human being heeding "a call within a call."

He struggles with his temper, and with his vows of chastity. The latter successfully. We see DeVuster taking up the cause of the lepers without any specific plans, and without any real idea of what to expect. Through the narration, he grows into the task which he has accepted. When he refers to the quarantined exiles as "my lepers," he is paternal, but not paternalistic or patronizing.

And what of the lepers? There are special instructions for handling victims of leprosy, but little or no information on what becomes of the victims.

Although "Damien," is mainly the story of DeVuster, it is also the story of the leper colony and the lepers.

Just as Leuiticus would exile the afflicted into death-in-life, Hawaii's negatively and unsympathetic Board of Health seems to have exiled its lepers to rambshackled huts on the one element part of the islands. Almost in passing, but very effectively, "Damien" recounts the human cost of this policy.

I have to wonder what DeVuster would have thought if he had waited another 50 years to step outside his koa wood casket and look at the world.

The Father Damien of the play never questions the necessity for the draconian public-health measures of his day, although he lived through the discovery of Hansen's bacillus and he might have learned posthumously that leprosy is not a highly contagious disease.

Would he have seen AIDS as a modern day leprosy? What would he have thought of our haphazard, media-driven public health efforts? "Damien," does not address these issues, but it manages to hold the audience's interest.

Trinity House is a tiny, intimate auditorium, and this is obviously not a slick, high-budget production. Yet "Damien," makes the most of the minimal stage furniture, and the intimate setting. Hedeon's professionally trained voice was at times too loud for the confined space, and on the first weekend of the play's run, he briefly forgot a few lines.

Much more important, however, he managed to convince me that this is how Father Damien DeVuster would have looked, sounded and thought. Seeing "Damien" was like reading a well-written work of non-fiction.

WHAT'S COOKING

To get your announcements in What's Cooking, send items to be considered for publication to: Keely Wygonik, Entertainment Editor, The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.

HOA KOW RESTAURANT
Vocal Michael Kriger is appearing at Ho Kow Restaurant, 4301 Orchard Lake Road, corner of Lone Pine in the Crosswinds Mall, 7-11 p.m. Thursdays, Dec. 3, 10, 17 and 24th.
THE LARK
The Lark, 6430 Farmington Road,

north of Maple Road in West Bloomfield is offering an Old English Holiday Feast, 7 p.m. Tuesday and Wednesday, Dec. 8 and 9, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, Dec. 14, 15, 16, 21, 22 and 23. Dinner accompanied by live music including madrigals and carols. Cost \$75 per person. Does not include beverages, tax or gratuity. Call 661-4466 for reservations.
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STAR CLIPPER
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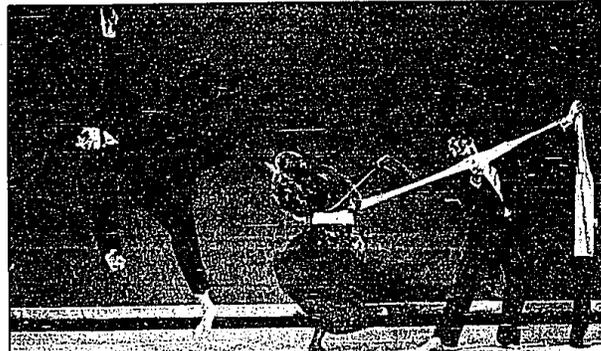
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