

THEATER

JET's 'Diary of Anne Frank' powerful

"The Diary of Anne Frank," Aaron Delloy Theatre, Jewish Community Center, 6500 West Maple, West Bloomfield, through Dec. 17. Call (810) 783-2900 or (810) 645-6668 for tickets, show times.

By Cathie Breidenbach
SPECIAL WRITER

The Jewish Ensemble Theatre's powerful and vibrant production of "The Diary of Anne Frank" revives her story after several decades in the theatrical attic. The drama, adapted from the diaries of 13-year-old Anne Frank, depicts the life of eight Jews in hiding for over two years in a cramped Amsterdam attic during World War II.

During daylight hours, they whispered, walked in stocking feet, couldn't flush the toilet, and froze in fear every time they heard the eerie wall of sirens or the sound of soldiers marching in the street — until the day the soldiers came for them. After the war, Anne's father, Otto Frank, the only survivor of the eight who shared the attic, discovered Anne's diary and published it.

REVIEW

Critics acclaimed the touching human face it brought to the history of the Holocaust. Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett adapted "The Diary of Anne Frank" for the Broadway stage where it enjoyed a long, successful run.

The Jewish Ensemble Theatre production of the Goodrich and Hackett play, directed by Pat Anselmi, brims with tensions, bickering, laughter, and mundane frustrations intensified by captivity and fear. Julie Van Dusen portrays Anne not as a soulful martyr of the Holocaust, but as an irrepressible and sometimes obnoxious adolescent. Anne puts a wet mop in Mr. Dussel's bed to get back at him for his fuss-budget bachelor ways. She talks constantly and much too loud, argues with her mother (Maureen Dorrington), chafes at her sister's (Cassandra McCarthy) calm goodness so unlike her own mercurial intensity, and adores her father.

Otto Frank centers and calms the collection of personalities forced into hiding. They're all dependent on the brave loyalty of Miep (Chris Ann Voudoukis) and Kraler (Joe Bailey) to bring contraband food, supplies, and news to them in their attic hiding place.

Robert Starke as Otto Frank commands respect as a man of dignity and decency. He could not turn out Mr. Dussel (Marty Bufalini) a dentist with no place to hide or the family of his business associate Mr. Van Daan to the Nazi dragnet. The Jewish Ensemble Theatre's own artistic director, Evelyn Orbach, plays Mrs. Van Daan as a materialist who clings to the fur coat her father gave her and flirts pitifully with Otto Frank. She squabbles incessantly with her husband (Robert Grossman) and they both harp at their son, Peter, played by Daniel Kahn whose portly ringlets ring a chord from his reclusive moodiness to his unruly shock of dark hair.

Those in hiding may sometimes have squabbled like greedy kids at camp when dividing their

meager food. They may have bickered, complained, and succumbed to moments of fearful hopelessness. Perfect they were not, but alive, feeling, and loving people they were. Although their lives may have been condensed and constrained by fugitive circumstances, their humanity was not diminished, and JET's superb production excels in bringing that humanity to touching, vibrant life.

Cathie Breidenbach of West Bloomfield teaches college writing classes and works as a freelance writer.

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