

THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK
By Francis Goodrich & Albert Hackett
Adapted by Wendy Kesselman
For tickets (757) 627-1234
September 24 – October 10, 2010

Hello, I'm Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large,

Wendy Kesselman's adaptation in a 1997 of a revival of ANNE FRANK was done to tell the story in today's world. It was good theatrical thinking. Attitudes and social behavior have changed radically since 1955 when the play was originally debuted. Producer Lillian Hellman felt the first version was "too Jewish" and insisted that two Hollywood writers be brought in to revise it. I saw that production and found it deeply moving. It's hard to destroy the emotional dynamite of this story. And yet, this telling of the nightmare those people went through is more penetrating and real because of the increased Jewish focus. Yet it should be strongly noted, that the play loses none of its universality.

Director Chris Hanna has assembled an exceptionally good cast. Nearly all of them have significant Broadway experience or important regional credits. The two families and a dentist are all very different from each other with clashing values and social behavior. Hiding from the Nazis in a horrible, rat infested attic with an ever diminishing supply of food, stress evokes tensions among the group and within the families. We learn of them through Anne's Diary.

Prepubescent Anne (Amelia Pedlow) is having normal teen age disagreements and lost communication with her mother, the warm, elegantly restrained Lori Wilmer. Her father, Robert Dorfman, a strong commanding presence, becomes an anchor for the attic prisoners. The VanDaans, Anne-Marie Cusson and the superb Kenny Morris, manage to be likeable and amusing even though they are obsessed with material values. Like a rat, he is not above stealing a crust of bread during the night. Zoe Winters is perfection as Margot Frank. Her fellow players, Amber Wood, Patrick Marlette, Ron Newman, and especially John Seidman as Mr. Dussel a forlorn dentist, give clear, well defined performances.

Amelia Pedlow is an attractive young lady of talent. Unfortunately she may be a year or two too mature to portray the 13 year old Anne. It's not an easy task to play this role. She must make broad leaps of change with little or no preparation. I felt she was so busy "being" 13 in the early scenes that she never became Anne Frank at 13. There is no foreshadowing of the potential of this seemingly special child... Later scenes work much better.

That oft-quoted line written by Anne at the end of the play, "I still believe in spite of everything that people are good at heart" provoked a more cynical response from me, Free of sentiment it makes one ask, "Are they?"

This is Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large and I'll see you at the next opening.