

# Anne Frank mired in sentimentality

*The Diary of Anne Frank*  
Kaasa Theatre  
til March 23

review by Gunnar Lindabury and Rhonda Malomet

It's 1942, somewhere in the business district of Amsterdam. Eight Jews try to share the cramped quarters in the "secret annex" of a merchant's establishment. Their only lifeline to Nazi-occupied Holland are a former business associate and his secretary (Alan Stebbings and Alysia Bachinsky). It is a touching story that has lived in immortality for the forty years since the discovery of Anne Frank's diary.

Those who have read the diary will know of it as the poignant personal experiences and feelings of a young girl coming into maturity during the repression and pain of the second world war.

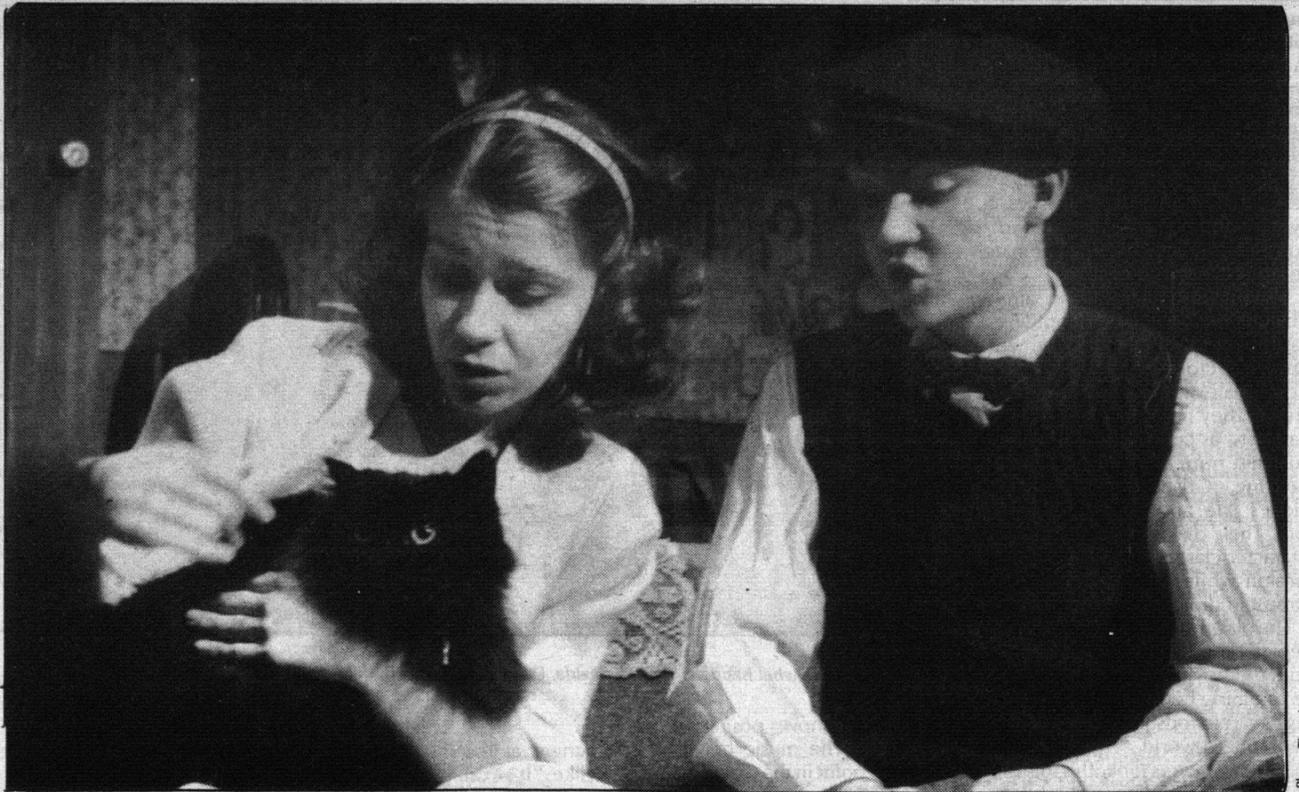
Unfortunately, they will also find the tension and subtlety of Anne's diary overworked and overly sentimental in the medium of Jace van der Veen's production. He seems to think that screaming and histrionics are essential to conveying the difficulty of the situation.

Certainly, van der Veen has a grasp on how to work the audience's emotions, bending and shaping their reactions by centering his play on Anne's temper tantrums and growing pains. (Steven Spielberg call Holland, your flight is in.)

Nonetheless, Bethany Ellis, who plays Anne, displays strong control in taking her tantrums and displays of affection just so far without getting carried away.

And granted, there is nothing overstated about being locked up in an attic with the very real threat of being taken away to a death camp at any moment. Van der Veen has experienced this tension himself, as he gracefully informs us in the program notes.

Yet, if we are to believe these people have been locked up in an attic with the threat of imprisonment or death hanging over them, then isn't it a bit silly for them to be running around and yelling at each other when they could be overheard at any moment.



Anne Frank (Bethany Ellis) displayed remarkable control in the Northern Lights production of *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

When Anne's father (Michael Murdock) tells his family at the beginning of the play that they must be quiet; that they mustn't even use the W.C. during the day because of the risk of being overheard, one expects a crawling stealth or chilling dread. The mood should reflect a low grade, building tension of the sort seen in an Agatha Christie novel: you know something's gonna happen; you can feel it, but you don't know when or where, and you hold your breath and clamp your teeth in the vain hope that it is going to pass you by.

In an environment like this, is there room for the personality conflicts and explosions that happen regularly through the play?

They take away from the low grade fear that one knows should be overwhelming every one of these voluntary prisoners.

One could defend the production by saying it's meant to be *impressionistic*, that the raised voices and violence are meant to represent interactions on an emotional or psychic plane. Yet the realism of the set, so much like the original site in Amsterdam, and the continuity of action in various areas (like washing the dishes from the last meal) all contribute to a sense of *here and now*. The continuity and the set, while displaying fine direction, do not support or contribute to an impressionistic drama.

This is a pity, since all of the actors contrib-

uted marvellous individual efforts, pulling us into wistful Channukah songs with the same ease as they made us believe in the silly petty domestic bickering that was happening a minute before.

Murdock maintained excellent control and projected great strength in his role as father figure and sole survivor. Deryk Hazel, in his role as Mr. Dussel, and Alison Wells as Mrs. Van Dan were especially credible as the irascible antagonists. Finally, Oberon deserves special recognition in his compelling portrayal of the long-suffering, repressed captive feline.

Photo: Timothy Hellum

Informal information sessions about sexual harassment, hosted by student and staff members of the President's Advisory Committee on Sexual Harassment (PACSH), will be held on the dates and times noted below:

**Biological Sciences Building, Room B-105**

**Tuesday, March 11 4:00 p.m.**

**Lister Hall, Gold Room**

**Tuesday, March 11 7:00 p.m.**

**Physics Building, Room 113**

**Wednesday, March 12 12:00 noon**

**Home Economics Building, Room B-16**

**Wednesday, March 12 12:00 noon**

**Materials Management Building**

**Conference Room, 2nd Floor**

**Thursday, March 13 3:00 p.m.**

**Fine Arts Building, Room 3-86**

**Friday, March 14 2:00 p.m.**

**Dentistry/Pharmacy Building**

**Room DP-2023**

**Friday, March 14 4:00 p.m.**

**Faculte Saint-Jean, Room 03**

**Monday, March 17 11:30 a.m.**

A short film will be presented, and members of PACSH will be happy to answer questions about sexual harassment or about PACSH.

**All students and staff are welcome to attend any of these sessions.**

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- must be a student at the University of Alberta
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