

'The Diary of Anne Frank' still asks 'Why?'

I doubt that anyone in the civilized world has not heard of "The Diary of Anne Frank" and has at least some idea of how the story goes:



THEATER REVIEW

ROBERT MCKINNEY

BARTER THEATRE
'THE DIARY
OF ANNE FRANK'

a young Jewish girl keeps a diary while she and her family are being hidden from the Nazis who eventually discover the family in the waning days of World War II.

All are shipped to concentration camps, and by war's end, the only survivor is the father, Otto Frank.

Anne's diary was recovered from a pile of Anne's papers found strewn on the floor of the upstairs apartment where the family, and some others, hid for almost two years before being exposed by an unknown informant.

The play based on Anne's diary has seen thousands of performances, some accurate and wonderful, some positively miserable.

The Barter Theatre's current rendition, as would be expected, pushes the boundaries of the former. It is stark without undue emphasis on suffering, deprivation and conflict, while, at the same time, it is human without becoming cloying.

Anne, played by Kelly Klein, is an inspiring character without being especially likable. She was, after all, a budding young woman going through all the emotional and physical changes of her age in addition to

isolation, loneliness and severe deprivation.

Danny Vaccaro is very believable as Otto Frank, and Tricia Matthews is perfect as his wife, Edith. Rebecca Reinhardt (Miep Gies), Hannah Ingram (Mrs. Van Daan), Michael Poisson (Mr. Van Daan), Ben Mackel (Peter Van Daan), Ashley Campos (Margot Frank), David McCall (Mr. Kraler) and Gannon McHale (Mr. Dussel) complete this well-selected cast. Richard Rose directs.

Many might consider "The Diary of Anne Frank" to be a wholly depressing play, but it is far from it. In fact, it is probably one of the theater's strongest affirmations of human resilience in the face of the most inhuman of situations.

For most of us, however, I think that, even though we don't consciously realize it, "Annie Frank" is a tiny crack through which we can have a momentary glimpse of one of life's most daunting mysteries: why, if there is a god that is both all good and all powerful, does he allow such suffering as the Holocaust to happen.

For whatever our reasons, "The Diary of Anne Frank" has a mesmerizing appeal and probably will for a long, long time to come. There is, without doubt, a lesson in it for all of us about hatred and both the brighter and darker sides of human nature, both individually and collectively.

This production plays through April 17 and is scheduled for a much-deserved nationwide tour later this year.

■ For dates, times and reservations, call (276) 628-3991 or visit www.bartertheatre.com.