

# Otterbein freshens well-known story

By Margaret Quamme  
For The Columbus Dispatch

The story behind the "The Diary of Anne Frank" is so familiar by now that any stage production might struggle to trigger strong emotions.

But Otterbein Theatre's new iteration breaks through the expected with an extraordinary title performance by Tatum Beck and with Wendy Kesselman's script, which revises the original play by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett in highlighting material from Frank's unabridged diary.

Beck's portrayal of the adolescent heroine washes away any taint of saintliness, leaving the audience to react — with the full knowledge that she won't make it to adulthood — to a lively, observant, passionate and sometimes-annoying teenager.

Kesselman's script veers from imposing artificial dramatic structure on the original diary, instead allowing small quarrels and celebrations among the eight people crammed into the



Tatum Beck as the title character in "The Diary of Anne Frank"  
[MARK MINEART]

## At a glance

■ Otterbein University will present "The Diary of Anne Frank" at 8 tonight through Saturday night at the Fritsche Theatre in Cowan Hall, 30 S. Grove St., Westerville. Tickets cost \$22. Call 614-823-1109, or visit [www.otterbein.edu/drama](http://www.otterbein.edu/drama)

annex, where they depend for their lives on Miep Gies (a sunny Kat Lee) to speak for them.

Scenes of daily life, including many that will be unfamiliar to viewers of the earlier play and film,

alternate with passages from Frank's diary and projected images and amplified voices of Hitler and from the Allies and pictures of Jews being sent to concentration camps.

Director Mark Mineart keeps the spotlight on Anne. The other characters sometimes seem comparatively drab, although some do make their presence felt: Maxwell Bartel as Anne's sympathetic father, Isabel Billinghamurst as flirtatious Mrs. van Daan and Daniel Kunkel as socially awkward Mr. Dussell.

Instead of emphasizing individual characters beyond the irrepressible Anne, Mineart plays up tensions

among a group of people forced to live in tight quarters under a state of constant fear — where the slightest action by one provokes outsized reactions from the others.

Stephanie Gerckens' deliberately crowded set reinforces the lack of privacy the characters endure; and T.J. Gerckens' lighting — sepia and low, except for Anne's dramatic soliloquies — adds to the sense of confinement.

The production plays the audience's knowledge of the fate of those in the annex against their uncertainty without becoming uncomfortably ironic.

More-realistic scenes are heightened by subtly showing them from Anne's dramatic point of view; the small problems and pleasures of waking life are contrasted with the horrifyingly prophetic power of Anne's nightmares.

Even those who think they've heard this story before will find something new here.

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