

Entertainment

Ambitious Otterbein production has good, weak moments

"Whose Life Is It Anyway?" may not be what the doctor ordered for light summer theater, but it is undeniably thought provoking.

This is an ambitious, serious undertaking by Otterbein College Summer Theatre and in that way, comparable to last summer's "The Elephant Man." "The Elephant Man" was superior — far more sophisticated and gripping — but "Whose



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Life Is It Anyway?" has its moments.

Both productions were directed by Ed Vaughan and starred a guest professional. For "Whose Life Is It Anyway?" it is Dennis Romer, a Los Angeles actor and 1971 Otterbein graduate. The show relies heavily on his abilities.

Romer is Ken Harrison, an English sculptor paralyzed from the neck down by a recent accident.

Harrison is intelligent, demanding and sarcastic. He has no intentions of clinging to a life void of physical capabilities.

This then is the play's conceit: Harrison wants to die and the hospital won't let him.

The play is a vehicle both for dark humor (most of it through Harrison's self-deprecating remarks such as his suggestion to use his body for a skateboard) and obvious but tough moral questions.

Playwright Brian Clark rather bludgeons the audience with his themes but his points are worthy. What are the duties of both patients and healers? What is quality of life? Who has ultimate responsibility for a human's life or death?

The play also works on several levels to puncture the Olympian status of physicians. Harrison refuses to take a sedative, terming it a tranquilizer for doctors to ease their guilt at his condition. "I'm paralyzed and you're impotent," he rages.

Review

Romer approaches the role with sobriety and conviction. Without the usual range of gestures and movement available to an actor — Harrison is flat on a hospital bed, motionless throughout the play — Romer relies on his voice and flashing eyes for expression. Romer makes Harrison human — funny, frustrated, pitiable and sometimes not very likable.

The production handles Romer's immobility very well. He's positioned so that he can be seen from all parts of the theater. And Fred Thayer's set makes excellent economical use of the arena setting.

The rest of the cast has mixed success. Susan Diol is graceful and convincing as a sympathetic doctor. Brent Erdy is rather hard-edged and one dimensional as the doctor committed at all costs to keeping Harrison alive.

Tim Gregory brings some needed

jazz in the play's lightest (and most welcome) role, a young orderly. Laura Stitt is capable, as far as she goes, in the role of the gruff senior nurse.

A minor but irritating problem is the actors' erratic English accents. Romer fares best because he uses the least inflection. Why doesn't the production simply do away with accents and let the audience use its imagination as it does with other aspects of the play?

"Whose Life Is It Anyway?" is best early on. Vaughan moves the

first act along briskly, but the second act bogs down. Part of this is the fault of the script and part is due to slow pacing. The only big scene in act two is the climax — when the authorities decide if Harrison will be allowed to die. This scene progresses at a painstaking speed, which robs the play of much of its final impact.

"Whose Life Is It Anyway?" continues through Saturday at the Campus Center Arena Theatre at Otterbein College.