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True to title, 'Everyman' still resonates today

By LAURIE HIGGINS
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

ORLEANS - The beginning of Advent on the Christian calendar marks a time of reflection, accountability and preparation and Stages Theatre Company's production of "Everyman" is the perfect play for the season, offering a thoughtful and compelling examination of what really matters in one's life here on earth.

This morality play was originally written in the 15th century by an anonymous author, believed to be a monk. A modernized version was re-written in 1911 by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, an Austrian poet and playwright as "Jedermann" ("Everyman") for the Salzburg Festival he co-founded and the play is still performed yearly at that festival in Germany.

While it is tempting to think that a play written 500 years ago has little relevance today, the opening night of "Everyman" on Friday proved that the issues of mankind haven't changed as much as we would like to believe.

This is a sublimely powerful production with many intricate layers of symbolism that resonate long after the play ends. Every detail, from the costumes to the casting to the stage itself, offers a deeper glimpse of the underlying message.

'Sister Huai-Kuang Miaos' costume designs are divine. Actors wear simple white tunics and pants with vibrantly colored long silk vests that perfectly characterize their roles. The archetypal characters are revealed through the beautifully sculpted masks mounted above the actors' heads.

The fact that Everyman is played by a woman with no mask adds to the symbolization that the character is an archetype for all of humanity. Sister Danielle Dwyer gives a superb performance, eliciting every emotion in the human repertoire. In what is mostly a serious drama, she deftly elicits laughter early in the play as Everyman tries to bargain with Death.

The action begins when God calls upon Death to visit Everyman. The oblivious human is

happily wandering through the good life when Death appears and lowers the boom. Everyman rages, pleads and bargains for more time to be worthy and earns a short reprieve.

She wins it, but it is a bitter-sweet victory at first. As Everyman searches for someone or something to accompany her on this long hard journey towards her own inevitable death, she finds that her earthly pleasures offer little comfort. Fellowship (symbolizing superficial friends) Cousin (symbolizing distant kinship and family ties) and Goods (symbolizing material possessions) aren't willing to join her.

As Everyman visits the archetypal characters that symbolize human existence, the suspense rises and the audience is drawn into the drama.

Even though the script was written long ago, the lines still resonate today. While arguing and pleading with Death, Everyman muses, "Funny death doth cometh when I had thee least in mind."

The combination of deft direction by David Haig with strong acting and perfect articulation from every actor make this play easily accessible and engrossing with a message for the audience to take heed as Everyman discovers: "Those that I loved best forsaketh me. Only my Good Deeds stay with me."

On Stage

■ **What:** "Everyman"

■ **Presented by:** Stages Theatre Company

■ **Written by:** Anonymous, modern script "Jedermann" 1911 by Hugo von Hofmannsthal

■ **When:** 3:00 p.m. today and Nov. 21; 7:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday

■ **Where:** Church of the Transfiguration, Rock Harbor, Orleans

■ **Tickets:** \$30; \$25 seniors, free for students and children

■ **Reservations:** Call box office at 508-240-2400

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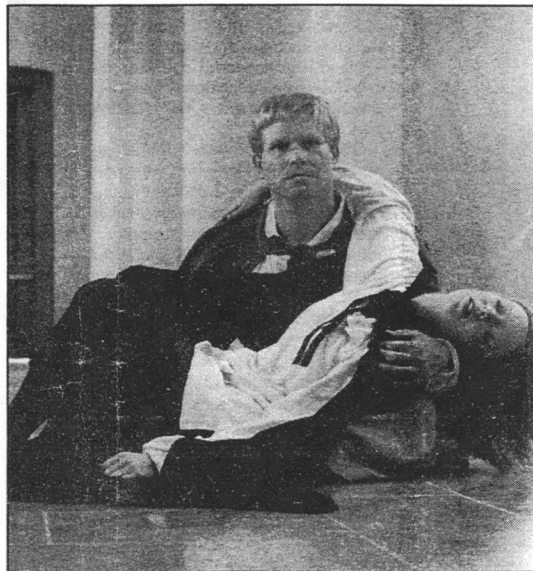
THEATER Review

By Carol K. Dumas
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A morality play seems fitting given this year's presidential election, in which the majority of voters professed "morality" as their guiding light.

"Everyman," currently being performed by the Stages Theater Company at the Community of Jesus, and directed by David Haig, is perhaps the most famous of the trilogy of drama genre (mystery and miracle the others) popular during the Middle Ages and the most enduring. Why? Its grim truths: death comes to every man; material possessions matter not, for it's how we have lived our lives that matters in the end. Any church-going person knows these lessons well.

First performed around 1485, "Everyman" is told in allegory, like many dramas of its day. God calls upon Death to announce to Everyman that the jig is up; that her life is about to end and she must make a pilgrimage to Death. But what has she (yes, Everyman is female in this play) got to say for herself on her day of reckoning? Well,



Actors of the Stages Theater Company portray values in the allegorical "Everyman" at the Church of the Transfiguration, in Orleans.

unfortunately, she's spent too much time living it up rather than living a life of good deeds. Not much has changed in 600 years.

But Everyman (played by Sr. Danielle Dwyer) isn't ready to

depart down the dark corridor just yet. "A thousand pounds shalt thou have and defer this matter for on another day," she pleads, and calls upon several of her most favorite companions in life to accompany her on this

inevitable journey. Sadly, she finds her good friends in life — Fellowship, Kindred and Cousin, Goods, Beauty, Strength, among them — have no interest in joining her on the path.

Help is on the way, via Confession, Knowledge and Good Deeds, so Everyman manages to redeem herself in the end.

The play is an authentic Middle Ages' production of "Everyman." The very capable Stages actors wear simple tunics, accented by brightly colored vests, and masks (designed by Sr. Huai-Kuang Miao) perched atop their heads to distinguish the different characters they portray. There's no set; as it would have been in the 15th century, the characters act out "Everyman" within the aisles of the church, as it would have been in the 15th century. Dialogue is spoken in rhyming couplets, in Middle English, peppered with "thees" and "thous" and "verily." It lacks the cadence and poetry of Shakespeare, but the Stages Company are masters of elocution.

The actors are earnest and passionate in their delivery, especially Dwyer, who commands the "stage" revealing

human frailty through a range of emotions (including some over-the-top tantrums), but often the echoing of voices off the soaring rafters in the massive Church of the Transfiguration was a bit distracting. Parts of some dialogue were totally lost to one side of the aisle when a character turned to the other side to speak.

However, the acoustics of the church are well-suited for the pleasant musical interludes provided by the woodwind quartet.

So all you blue state folks out there: if you've lost your moral compass, "Everyman" can help you locate it.

If you go...

What: "Everyman" presented by Stages Theatre Company

When: 7:30 p.m. Nov. 19, 20; 3 p.m. Nov. 21

Where: Church of the Transfiguration, Rock Harbor, Orleans, 508-240-2400

