

# Drama and comedy combined in Next Act play

'Someone Who'll Watch Over Me' tells story of three men held hostage

By Robert McGuire

The drama in "Someone Who'll Watch Over Me," the Frank McGuinness play in production now by the Next Act Theatre company, is not whether or not the three Westerners held hostage in a Lebanon basement will physically survive their captivity.

The drama is if they will "break" — can they find a way to keep from going mad or descending too far into despair to ever return?

This psychological drama is a psychological comedy also. The play operates on the theory that if you don't laugh, you will cry your eyes out.

So the Next Act production is often very funny, sending the audience into waves of laughter as the characters devise ways to hold off the boredom that threatens to wash over both them and the audience.

They particularly rely on elaborate games of charades and play acting, reliving historic tennis matches, illustrating children's songs about rabbits and hunters, and playing out movie scripts that they have written about themselves.

But it's difficult to keep amused in this fashion. Boredom is an inherent element of a play about three people imprisoned in one room — even more so when each of the three are chained to the wall. The Next Act players do an admirable job of portraying tedium without being tedious.

The characters' manic attempts to keep their own spirits up inevitably wane, however, and if the play has a drawback, it is the too frequent repetition of the pattern of ending a scene with sober reminders that everything will be all right.

The prisoners' main method of survival is not comedy but reliance upon each other. The title comes from the idea that



they need to watch out for each other.

If one of them "goes under" with despair, they believe they all will. The deeper drama is about who will muster the strength and selflessness to watch over the others.

The obstacle in their path to this goal is a stew of ethnic and personality conflicts that make them often insufferable to one another.

Adam (Shawn Douglass) is a benevolent American doctor who is a touch too much on the responsible side to suit Edward (Peter Reeves), who is a womanizing, hard-partying Irish journalist reluctant to participate in Adam's regimen for physical fitness and moral straightness.

Coming to a kind of mutual tolerance and dependence, they are joined by Michael (C. Michael Wright), a staid and meek Englishman whose reserve — stiff upper lip and all that — is infuriating to Edward.

Edward turns on Michael with his bitter wit, bringing a dangerous tension to their cell, with Adam often put in the role of adjudicator.

The actors play their roles excellently, the audience always convinced of the longing, frustration and boredom they feel.

This is all the more remarkable because there are so few characters to carry on such a long play. They shoulder a large and often fascinating burden. The only problem is that there is about 20 minutes too much of it to be carried off with complete success.

*"Someone Who'll Watch Over Me," directed by David Ceasarini, runs through March 15 at the Stiemke Theater, 108 E. Wells St. For showtime and ticket information, call 224-9490.*