

Brighton Beach uplifts despite Depression

By ELIZABETH CAMPBELL
Aquinas Staff Writer

Backstage Productions, in conjunction with the Institute of Electronic and Electrical Engineers, kicked off its production of Neil Simon's *Brighton Beach Memoirs* on Thursday in Eagen Auditorium.

The play is based upon the trials, both internal and external, of a Jewish family living in Brooklyn during the Great Depression.

The story is told through the person of Eugene Jerome, an awkward 14-year-old, played convincingly by Christopher Eibach.

Eibach's portrayal of the excitable, hormone-powered youth reveals great talent and understanding of the character.

He speaks in a perfect New York-Jewish accent, and his sense of comic timing, an important element in any Neil Simon play, is impeccable.

The play takes place during a period of great conflict, both in the nation and in the Jerome family. The United States, at the time, was enmeshed in the Great Depression and on the doorstep of the most destructive war it had ever seen.

The Jerome family, having its own problems, both financially and personally, represent a sort of metaphorical micro-society. In the midst of several serious themes, Simon's use of wry humor serves to lighten the otherwise grim atmosphere.

Perhaps the most important element in delivering a successful rendition of *Brighton Beach Memoirs* is the portrayal of interpersonal relationships in the family. For the most part, Backstage Productions' cast accomplishes this nicely.

The interplay between Eugene Jerome and his mother, played by Sheila Searcy, was nothing less than dynamic. The witty relationship between Eibach and Searcy brought to life the timeless relationship between a mother and her adolescent son.

Also humorous was the older-younger brother relationship between Eugene and Stanley, played by Mark Manne. Manne's performance emphasized the mixture of exasperation and love that 18-year-old Stanley feels for his younger brother.

The audience also sees a bond of mutual respect developing between Stanley and his father, played by James Palermo. Even Palermo's rather forced performance could not detract from the script's firm establishment of this key stage in the human growth process.

Other realistic portrayals of family relationships are seen in the tension between sisters Kate and Blanche (played by Patricia Spalletta), and the hostility in the teenager-mother relationship between Blanche and daughter, Nora, played by Melissa Scanlon.

The casts' strong portrayal of interpersonal relationships practically guarantees the



Christopher Eibach plays Eugen Jerome in "Brighton Beach Memoirs." The play runs again Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m., and Sunday at 3 p.m.

Aquinas photo/JOHN BATTISTINI

success of *Brighton Beach Memoirs*. There are, however, other elements in the play's favor as well. The intricate, life-like set, designed by Backstage Productions' technical staff member Reenie Ednie, transports the cast back to pre-war Brooklyn.

First-time director, Paul Cianci, a senior

history major from Dunmore, makes full use not only of the stage set, but the entire auditorium, inviting the audience further into the life of Eugene Jerome.

Tickets are \$4 for students. The play runs again this Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m., and Sunday at 3 p.m.

King encourages student initiative

By MAUREEN HENNESSY
and CLARE McMONAGLE
Aquinas Staff Writers

The dream of Martin Luther King Jr. still lives within the spirit and convictions of his daughter, Yolanda King. Her speech Thursday touched on not only the issue of racial equality, but on many other existing social problems.

The speech provided an opportunity for University students to interact with the Scranton community.

Racial and social barriers dissolved as students and adults of all ages rose to question King at the end of her speech. A group of grammar school children posed some questions.

King reflected on the civil rights movement of the 1960s, emphasizing the need to remember the struggle which minorities faced to

gain their rights as equal citizens.

"To you, the civil rights movement may seem like ancient history," King said. "Yet 30 years was not very long ago, and offsprings of the problems that existed then are alive today."

She emphasized the importance of the roles of young people in the fight against injustice. In the 1960s and 1970s, college students literally changed the way our country thought.

Today, however, "many college students have become laid back," King said. She urged students to become involved in their own areas.

She also acknowledged and praised the many people who are dedicated to working for the betterment of society.

"They are on this campus, they are in this community," King said.



Yolanda King

Yet, she said, they often go by unrecognized and face a difficult task.

Instead of working for greater steps toward equality, they are forced to take a defensive stand to

protect existing institutions like affirmative action, she said.

King pointed out that our view of culture is still dominantly Eurocentric; the events in our history books are often biased, depicting American history as mainly European while often ignoring other countries and races.

King observed that America is not a "melting pot," but rather a beautiful mosaic of different cultures. She stressed the need for multicultural diversity.

"The challenge," King said, "is to be willing and ready to accept and include as equals all of the voices of all of our fellow citizens in every aspect of American life." Her work with many different racial groups meets the challenge head on.

Another of King's major concerns was the imbalance between

the government's interest concerning military growth as opposed to the growth of important social needs, particularly education.

While our country is good at waging war, our educational system is lagging behind the other industrial nations.

She said she feels the national "obsession" with militarism, the rising violence and the neglect of education and job training are all connected.

King's speech observed the problems in the United States honestly; she did not cringe from the harsh realities that exist in this society, nor did she attempt to soften them with unrealistic hopes for the future.

Instead, she managed to address issues too easily pushed aside with a passion that made the urgency of dealing with them apparent.