

EIU theater's 'E/R:' A dose of reality

When EIU's theatre department described its 1987-88 season opener, *E/R (Emergency Room)*, as a "slice-of-life comic drama set in a Chicago hospital emergency room on a busy Saturday night." I sort of expected something on the order of *Airplane* or *Young Doctors in Love* — a spoof with lots of commotion and outrageous jokes and sight gags, especially since it was conceived by Ronald L. Berman, M.D., and written by him and seven others, including Zaid Farid, aka Philip Wright, a former Eastern theatre student.

But instead, the play, which ran for three years at Chicago's Forum Theatre, is a straightforward account of a day, or rather night, in the life of fictional Lincoln Memorial Hospital's emergency room. And it is indeed a busy night. There's a variety of types. A middle-aged businessman complains of chest pains, but says he doesn't have the time to check in for tests. He returns later that night, the victim of a fatal heart attack. A girl who says she's suffering from constipation turns out to be pregnant and gives birth right then and there. An elderly man takes forever to get to the point that he can't sleep.

Other cases include a stab victim, a hypochondriac, a drug ad-

Carl
Lebovitz



dict, and a battered child. Sometimes they overlap, the dialogue, and with it the audience's attention, shifting back and forth among them. The others on stage don't freeze, but go right on with their business, silently mouthing words. It's somewhat like watching the emergency room of *St. Elsewhere*. In film or on TV, of course, the shift in focus would be accomplished by the camera. On stage, it would seem more realistic and effective to let the dialogues overlap.

There are two doctors on duty, one an earnest, dedicated Dr. Kildare type, the other a frustrated swinger with a condominium for the weekend and nobody to share it with. There are also two nurses and a receptionist. Most of the characters and types are sketchily drawn, and it's up to the director and actors to flesh them out. Eastern's director, Gerald Sullivan, seemed more

concerned with the logistics of getting his large cast (I counted 33) on and off the stage and blocking the fairly steady traffic.

Things went smoothly the night I was there, and the young actors all gave a good account of themselves, notably Gerald M. Lunsford, Robert Poe, Janine Kardas, Kimberly Robinson, Jennifer Andrews, Bruce Janu, J. Kenneth Barnett III, John Tabor, and Anne Lloyd. And Linette Vogt and Angela Snead almost stole the

show as the "constipated" young lady and her worried mother, respectively.

Together they provided an evening of engrossing, if not compelling theatre.

Clarence Blanchette's realistic set and Donna Conrad's costumes were first-rate.

There will be a final performance tonight at eight in the Fine Arts Center Theatre. Caution: A couple of four-letter words are used.

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