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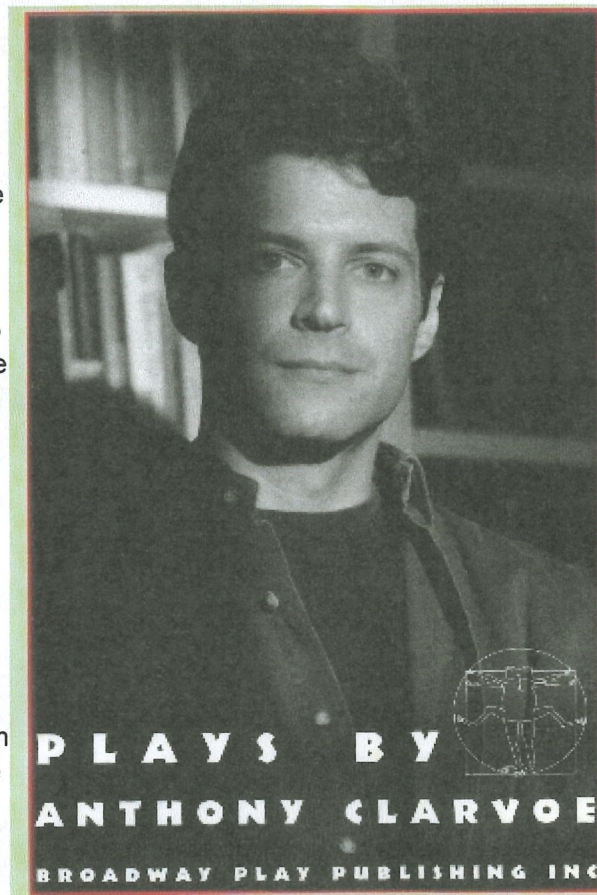
Review: UL Theatre, "The Living"

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There's lies, there's damn lies, and then there's statistics. Or so might say John Graunt, lead character in the **UL Department of Performing Arts** presentation, *The Living*.

Written by Anthony Clarvoe about the Great Plague which enveloped London in 1665, and frequently using diaries, newspaper reports, or other original sources, the drama played to a full house on its opening night at the University's Fletcher Hall. Fine acting, beautiful staging, and passionate direction by Department Chairman Nyalls Hartman made it a memorable evening.

The story deals with characters who were unable to escape from (or perhaps chose to remain in) London during that horrible period. It confronts all attending with a question - What would YOU do if 1000 people in your city died in a month, then in a week, then in a day, then in an hour? And who would you blame? Would it be yourself, the government structures, the government leaders, the economy, refugees, the medical establishment,



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health care policy, the church, or, indeed, God himself? With our own recent experiences of Hurricane Katrina, and more recently Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, it is a question all of us in Southwest Louisiana can understand. Strangely enough the story, about one of the most horrible events to confront the human race, is not about death but about life. And though there are parallels to much going on today (and that has gone on in history under every government, in every generation), it is fundamentally an affirmation of the human spirit. The ending, which I shan't spoil for you, gives us Clarvoe's take on the way it's 'sposed to be.

Outstanding in a terrific cast is Clayton Shelvin as John Graunt, a statistician who has examined the Bills of Mortality to find causes of the epidemic. As he finds out (and who in the modern world of information over-kill and 24 hour news would not understand) the information is inaccurate, self serving and a gross underestimate. In small steps, he leads us through the mysteries of the 1665 plague and of human nature. Shelvin spoke directly to the audience much of the time in a narration of sorts, or perhaps a lecture, but he effectively became our friend and companion as we experienced the terror and fear which enveloped Londoner's of the era. Shelvin was moving, sensitive, and portrayed John Graunt beautifully. Also outstanding was David Huynh, as Rev. Vincent, and Greta Trosclair in a haunting birth scene.

The stage was arranged in three levels, one of which was the theater floor itself, which aided in bringing the impact of the action directly to the audience. Throughout the presentation, the characters never touched (who would), but yet they were acting in the virtual lap of the audience. We were drawn in; we recoiled. Lighting designer Travis Johnson provided evocative lighting which heightened the emotion, aided the story, and carried the action quickly from scene to scene. Costume designer Laura Brody's work was superior.

Theatre in Acadiana is alive and well, and in the last few weeks it was easy for this reviewer to attend four presentations. UL is to be congratulated for assuming a leadership role in this important artistic area. Though not without controversy, this script was out of the ordinary and the cast was full of young people who were obviously inspired, taught, and growing in the hands of the faculty. The direction, technical work, and acting were top notch. Congratulations to Department Chairman Hartman and the UL administration and faculty for assuming your rightful role.

Interestingly, the final curtain call had fourteen players on stage. Yet the program only listed ten cast members. There's lies, there's damn lies, and then there's statistics.

The show continues thru October 26 with a 7:30 curtain Thursday, Friday, and Saturday

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and a 2:00 matinee on Sunday. DON'T MISS IT!!!

---*Donald Voorhies*

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