

Students taste the 'real world' in Mercy production of 'Working'

By Teresa A. Parsons

"Hey somebody — don't you wanna hear the story of my life?"

That was the cry of the chorus last Friday and Saturday evening as students from Our Lady of Mercy High School presented "Working," a musical adapted from Studs Terkel's book of the same name. Terkel compiled his book from the reflections of real people on their work — from housewives to steel workers, parking lot attendants, executives, truck drivers, cleaning women and salesmen.

The fact that each character in the program has a name rather than just a job title is one indication of the musical's message — that each individual is valuable and that workers' pride in whatever work they do is noble.

The message is also one of frustration. "Jobs are not big enough for people," laments Nora Watson, an office worker portrayed by Tanya Marie Ferguson. She is disillusioned because she has been reproved for working too hard. "The road to ruin is doing a good job," she asserts.

A factory worker who assembles luggage takes a more philosophical view of her infinitely more monotonous job. "You wish you didn't have to work in a factory," says Astrid Galipeau, who plays the role in this production, "but when that's all you can do, what else is there?"

Mike LeFevre, a steel worker played by Josh Lewin, a Brighton High School senior, is proud not to fit the stereotype of a "dumb" blue-collar worker. But he yearns for some kind of recognition.

"It isn't that the average working guy is dumb — he's just tired," LeFevre says. "It's the non-recognition by other people that really bothers you ... This piece of steel may be a car someday. Somewhere in the suburbs, some guy gets in and drives around. He doesn't know anything about you."

"Just a Housewife," sung by Mercy senior Julie Palermo, expresses the frustration of Kate Rushton at the subtle and not-so-subtle ways society diminishes her work.

"All I am is someone's mother. All I am is someone's wife. All of which seems unimportant ... it's just my life," she retorts.



Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal

Among the cast members of Mercy High School's production of "Working" were: (front row, left to right) waitress Jean Kanaley, news girl Stephanie Clader, fireman Mike Romano; (second row) executive Jennifer Conlon and sailor Patrick Coughlin; (rear) maid Susan Fanale, truck driver Greg DeSmith, steel worker Josh Lewin, housewife Julie Palermo, teacher Ann DiBiasi and streetwalker Lisa Griffen.

Few of the cast members had experienced the world of work or could relate directly to the people they portrayed, so director Julianne Palma and her cast studied the original monologues in Terkel's book. "We looked at what they said and experimented a lot. We tried everything we could think of," Palma said. "They began as isolated acting exercises and developed as they came together."

"Mrs. Palma told us right away to forget everything we already knew about acting," Coughlin recalled. "These are real people."

Although she's never been a waitress, Jean Kanaley could nevertheless appreciate DeLores Dante's pride and dedication.

"When someone says 'Hey — you're terrific! How come you're just a waitress?' I say 'What's wrong? Don't you think you deserve to be served by me?'" Dante declares.

"She just sincerely loves her job — she looks forward to coming to work," said Kanaley, a Mercy senior. "And you know, I'm tired tonight, but I had to come anyway and try to light up the stage — that's what she would have done."

Adapted by Stephen Schwartz and Nina Faso, the musical "Working" features songs by James Taylor, Micki Grant and Craig Carnelia, among others. The set was simple — two-tiers divided by corporate logos that spelled out the letters "working."

"As far as I am aware, this is only the second time it has been presented in the Rochester area, and (the first time) was seven or eight years ago," said Palma. An English teacher at Mercy, she chose the musical for its message, which she and members of the cast agree has deeply affected them.

"It (the play) has changed me, definitely," Coughlin explained. "The cleaning woman, the housewife, the dad scenes ('Fathers and Sons' sung by Rob Nelson) — they show you things you have taken for granted for so many years that I just never thought about," he said. "I couldn't even look my mother in the eye."

"After seeing this show, if you really listen to it and understand it, you can't take people for granted," he added.

Mercy Paper Honored

Our Lady of Mercy High School's newspaper, The Quill, recently received a first-place rating in the Empire State School Press Association High School Newspaper Evaluation, for the 1984-'85 school year.

Mercy's newspaper staff attended the ESSPA Convention at the Newhouse School of Public Communications of Syracuse University in September.

Summer Scholarships

Scholarships will be awarded this winter by the Krakow-Rochester Sister Cities Committee to two young adults from the Rochester area. Each scholarship is for a six-week summer program at Krakow's Jagiellonian University.

Scholarships are available to high school graduates, 18 to 30 years of age, currently residing in the Rochester area, who have at least one parent of Polish descent. Awards include room, board and tuition in Poland, and round-trip transportation to Krakow from New York City.

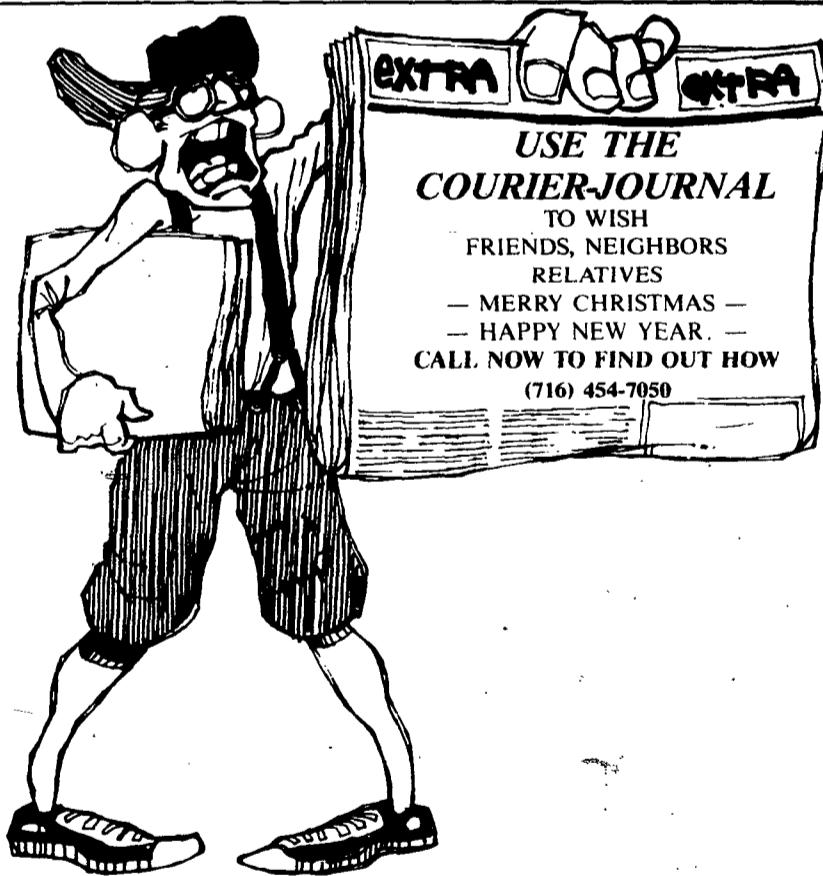
The session, organized for American stu-

dents, covers such topics as Polish history, economics, literature, music, theater, folk art and contemporary problems, and includes instruction in the Polish language.

Applications are available at the General Pulaski Community Library, Hudson Avenue and Norton Street, Rochester, and from John Stencik, chairman of the committee, (716)467-0930. Completed forms, along with one letter of recommendation from the applicant's school or employer, should be returned to Stencik, 92 Carol Drive, Rochester 14617, no later than Tuesday, Dec. 31.

Volunteers Needed

Parents Anonymous of Rochester, a self-help agency for parents with potential or active child abuse problems, is in need of volunteers to work with children's groups. For additional information, call Parents Anonymous of Rochester at (716)454-2300.



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