

A Flawless 'Anne Frank' in Stamford

By HASKEL FRANKEL

STAMFORD

ICANNOT speak for other critics, but I know that I have often brought a different standard to reviewing productions by regional theaters from those I apply to Broadway productions. On Broadway, perfection is expected. At a regional theater, excuses are made.

Happily, the Hartman Theater Company's production of "The Diary of Anne Frank" needs no excuses. It is a shattering experience from beginning to end, a play that is heartbreaking and uplifting.

I think that the Hartman Theater Company has surpassed the original 1955 Broadway production. Where Broadway had star and featured actors in key parts, which automatically focused attention on certain roles, the Hartman has none, which gives all the characters an equality on stage.

The play, by Frances Goodrich and

Albert Hackett, is based on the diary that teen-age Anne Frank kept during the two years she and her family hid from the Nazis on the attic floor of the Amsterdam building in which her father had had his business. It was the time when Nazis were sending Jews to death camps.

With the help of two non-Jewish Dutch friends who brought them food, Otto Frank, his wife and two daughters; the Van Daans and their son Peter, and a dentist named Dussel lived for two years, shut away from sunlight, by making minimum sound during the hours when there would be workmen beneath them. That these eight people survived for two years under impossible circumstances is almost miraculous. That they were captured and sent to the concentration camps — only Otto Frank survived — on the last train out of Amsterdam is tragic.

The Hartman production is filled with virtues, beginning with John Fala-bella's excellent set, cavernous and dusty and always pressing down on the actors. The cast is excellent throughout. Only lack of space prevents individual commendation, though one or two must be mentioned, beginning with

Lori Putnam in the difficult role of Anne. Technically, Anne is any 13-year-old girl on the verge of womanhood, yet because of her circumstances and the diary she left to the world, Anne must be something more so as to hold her place on stage in a world that belongs more to adults than children. Whatever that indefinable something is, Miss Putnam realizes it completely.

In the smallish role of Miep, the Dutch woman who risks her life to care for the attic people, Jacqueline Coslow is a marvel. On each entrance she brings with her the feel of fresh air and health that is the world denied to those in the attic, and she fully conveys that there is still decency in the world beyond the attic.

Carl Low plays Otto Frank, and his performance is one of a handful I have seen that contains greatness. In fact to say he plays Otto Frank is to demean his work. He *is* Otto Frank. Mr. Low opens the play, which is told in flashback as Otto Frank reads his daughter's diary. On his entrance, before we know that the time is after the war or what the attic must represent to Otto Frank, Mr. Low managed to shatter me and tell me all the things the script was still to say. His work throughout

was low-key, completely natural and consistently brilliant.

The last word of praise must go to Gene Frankel, the director (no relation to this reviewer), whose pacing is sure throughout. In the brief time that the regional theater allowed for rehearsals, Mr. Frankel has unified his cast and blended them into the set so that it appears they have lived there for years.

If you decide not to see "The Diary of Anne Frank" because the material sounds depressing, you will be denying yourself a true theatrical experience. Furthermore, you will be underestimating the talents of the playwrights. The Hacketts (they are man and wife) have filled the play with hope, love and human dignity.

I think that the Hartman should stage this play, with the same company and director, at this time every year. For that matter, I don't think this production should be allowed to close after only a three-week run. ■

"The Diary of Anne Frank," by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett. Hartman Theater Company, 61 Atlantic Street, Stamford, through Dec. 17. Telephone 323-2131.



Lori Putnam and Carl Low
in 'The Diary of Anne Frank'