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An Impressively-Cast Close-Up on 'Anne Frank'

BY RUSS BICKERSTAFF JAN. 10, 2022 9:32 A.M.

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The intensity of drama in small spaces is often lost to larger stages. This month, Milwaukee Entertainment Group explores a dark period in 20th century history on a small stage. *The Diary of Anne Frank* is delicately conjured into the basement of the historic Brumder Mansion on West Wisconsin Avenue. The tenacious Reva Fox directs an impressively nuanced cast. Zaela Schlissel plays the title character with heart and passion. A senior at Kettle Moraine High School, Schlissel is roughly the same age that Anne was,



giving her performance the added earnestness and authenticity. Seasoned actor Randall T. Anderson brings a warm gravitas to the stage in the role of Anna's father Otto. Pam Scheferman lends the performance a subtly textured portrayal of Anne's mother Edith.

Scenic designer Amanda J. Hull has immersed the audiences in Anne Frank's world. The tiny confines in which she and her family hid from the Nazis are nestled all over the intimate studio theatre space. The close-quartered lack of privacy is brought into sharp focus under Fox's direction. COVID concerns on one of the smallest stages in town found the entire cast performing in mask opening night. It took a while to get used to, but the masks added a sense of immediacy about the production. Fox and Hull allow audiences to share in the tension in a way the screen or the larger stage simply could not hope to render on any meaningful level. Schlissel's heartfelt portrayal of a girl coming-of-age in hiding is brought to vivid life in the space between the delicate sighs and shadows of human conflict.



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Milwaukee Entertainment Company's production of *The Diary of Anne Frank* continues through Jan. 22 at the Brumder Mansion, 3046 W. Wisconsin Ave. For ticket reservations and more, visit milwaukeeentertainmentgroup.com.

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Russ Bickerstaff is a theater critic and aspiring author living on the south side with his wife and two daughters.

