



Photos by Phil Waldstein

Bri, the father of 'Joe Egg,' and Sheila, the mother, give epilepsy medicine to their daughter, and Bri and Sheila attempt to convince each other to stay at home that night.

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'A Day in the Death of Joe Egg'

Take a play about a spastic child whose parents are occasionally bitter and cruel, throw in a handful of middle-class stereotypes and title the whole thing "A Day in the Death of Joe Egg." Sound like a loser?

Don't be too sure.

Carnival Theater is serving up "Joe Egg," by Peter Nichol, as its first production of the 1973 summer season, and director Larry West is confident of the show's quality and merit.

"On the surface, it sounds like kind of a sick play," he says. "But a definite warmth and power emerges on a closer look, and our biggest goal is to communicate that to the audience."

"Joe Egg" is a sort of pet name given to Josephine, an 11-year-old retarded child "whose life span is really more of a death span" (hence the title).

Interestingly, the girl's parents, Brian and Sheila, are the central figures of the play. Their attitudes toward their daughter and how they cope and adjust to her problem provide the real meat and message of the play.

"Joe Egg" defies conventional categorization: it has drama, but it is not a tragedy; it has some strong, broad humor, but it is not a comedy. The result is a mixture of humor, pathos and drama that makes the audience shift emotional gears from one extreme to the other.

Much of the broad humor comes when Brian and Sheila reminisce over their first years with Josephine. Brian does some strong comic imitations of people they knew and met — including a hilarious por-

trayal of a swaggering German doctor. This exaggerated role-playing, according to West, is one of the ways Brian and Sheila cope emotionally with their problem.

"It all sounds very heavy and psychologically complicated," says West, "but Nichol writes with a tremendous understanding of the problem and always manages to inject a light touch."

"It's a good show," he says, "and we've worked very hard to keep it tasteful. It says a lot about people and how they adjust to situations."

Appearing in the play as Josephine is 10-year-old Diane Harris, who has performed in some local children's theater productions. "She's had to learn to alter all her normal reactions," says West, "like covering the urge to brush the hair out of her eyes. She's done a super job in a demanding role."

Richard Hawkins and Demi McDevitt play the girl's parents, Charles Harrill and Leah Matson play a stereotyped high-brow couple, and veteran Carnival performer Gwen Jackson appears as Brian's possessive mother.

"A Day in the Death of Joe Egg" opens this Friday and Saturday and continues July 5, 6 and 7 under the tent adjacent to Villard Hall. Tickets, selling for \$2, \$2.50 and \$3.50, may be reserved at the University Theater box office from noon to 5 p.m. Monday through Thursday, and until 9 p.m. on performance nights. Curtain is at 8:30 p.m.

Scott Barkhurst