

by Ted Hoover

# Sister Act

## Miss Dessa

Written by Shirley Hardy Leonard  
Directed by Eileen J. Morris  
Kuntu Repertory Theatre  
Masonic Temple Auditorium, Oakland  
Thru April 5, 624-7298

The Kuntu Repertory Theatre presents the local premiere of Shirley Hardy Leonard's comedy *Miss Dessa*. Set in a small town on the outskirts of Chicago, the play centers around the three sisters of the Warnette family: Althea (the slut), Amanda (the holy roller) and Ardessa, a school teacher and the most together of the three. Dessa is raising Gene, the son of the fourth Warnette, Billy, who disappeared years ago and left the boy in her care.

Because of some weird legal maneuvering I didn't quite understand, the family home has been left to Dessa. Now that the steel mill which has kept the community alive is closing, and due to some equally confusing plot complications, Althea and Amanda have to marry off Dessa or lose a great deal of money in the sale of the house.

At least that's the plan. While her sisters conspire to come up with some loser, Dessa finds her own man and that courtship sets off a number of reverberations through the family.

In spite of a certain inconsistency in plot, which tends to cause not a few moments of puzzlement, Leonard has crafted a swift and very funny play that, when it's good, plays like an extremely well-written sit-com.

And that's not a complaint. More than anything Leonard, it seems to me, has set out to write a big, jokey comedy and with her great ear for amusing dialogue she almost always hits her mark. It could be said that Leonard has written "types" more than characters, but when those types are so funny, and their interaction so hysterical, you could say a lot worse about a playwright.

The set piece of the evening is an extended scene in which the three sisters get drunk and level all sorts of charges at each other and it's big, non-stop laughs.

Director Eileen J. Morris may go even further than the playwright in "cardboarding" these characters, but she's certainly no slacker when it comes to the ruthless mechanics of comedic theater. With a highly effective cast led by Karla Washington and Linda Hunt, the show is a winner from start to finish.