

# Prime Stage Theater's 'Anne Frank' is a sensitive retelling of cautionary tale

The show will run through May 13 at the New Hazlett Theater on the North Side and uses an adaptation of the book, "The Diary of a Young Girl," which premiered on Broadway in 1955.

By [TOBY TABACHNICK](#)

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In the show, which runs through May 13 at the New Hazlett Theater, Anne Frank is played by Madeline Dalesio. Actor Somerset Young plays Peter van Daan. (Photo by Laura Slovesko)

When a production of "The Diary of Anne Frank" is done right, the audience leaves the theater feeling a sense of despair tinged with a touch of hope.

The creative team at Prime Stage Theatre is doing it right.

The show, which runs through May 13 at the New Hazlett Theater on the North Side, uses Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett's original stage adaptation of the book, "The Diary of a Young Girl" by Anne Frank, which premiered on Broadway in 1955. It went on to win the Tony Award for best play that year, as well as the Pulitzer Prize for drama, and opened in seven cities in Germany and in Amsterdam in 1956.



Madeline Dalesio as Anne in the stage adaptation of the book "The Diary of a Young Girl." (Photo by Laura Slovesko)

Anne's diary itself was first published in the United States in 1952 with a forward by Eleanor Roosevelt. The Jewish teenager's vivid and intimate account of hiding in a Dutch annex during the Holocaust left its mark on the consciousness of American society, bringing to the fore an honest narrative of the horror of being hunted and the threat of slaughter.

The cautionary message of the play is lamentably timeless, and therefore "The Diary of Anne Frank" is a vital piece of theater which should be done often. Kudos to Prime Stage for taking this on.

The set of this show is crucial, and Jonmichael Bohach's detailed design successfully provides the audience with the feel of the claustrophobic space in which eight people lived for more than two years.

Large screens hover above, and between scenes they project sepia images of World War II Europe, superimposed with excerpts from Anne's diary — handwritten and translated into English — while the spunky Madeline Dalesio as Anne narrates the texts.

Dalesio, 13, is the same age as was Anne when she entered the annex. It's a nuanced role, which the young actor ably handles. Her Anne arrives on stage as an effervescent, chatty moppet, but evolves into a self-aware older teen who gains insight into, and is able to show empathy for, the inner turmoil of her family members and housemates.



The "Frank" family. From left: April Daras (Edith), Michael Perry (Otto), Madeline Dalesio (Anne), and Gabrielle Kogut (Margot). (Photo by Laura Slovesko)

Michael Perry (Otto Frank) is the show's anchor. The play begins with him returning to the annex after the war, along with Miep Gies — played by Heather Irwin — who found and saved Anne's diary, and ends at the same moment. Otto Frank was the only one of the housemates to survive the war, liberated from Auschwitz in 1945. Perry delivers a complex portrayal of the patriarch, a gentle yet strong soul who graciously sacrifices his own family's comfort to protect four other Jews, one a stranger.

The ensemble in "Anne Frank" has a yeoman's task, with each of the eight performers that portray the housemates constantly on stage for almost the entire two-hour duration of the show. There are no breaks for these actors — just as the actual housemates were continuously together for two years — and the performances of Prime's players are focused and impassioned even when they have no dialogue.

Even though we all know how this story plays out for those in the annex, Wayne Brinda's direction nonetheless builds a foreboding sense of suspense, and when the menacing footsteps of the Nazis are heard coming for the Franks and their guests, it is hard to not to hope it's all a mistake. Yet, as the show reveals humanity at its most evil, Anne's optimistic words continue to echo: "I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are good at heart." **PJC**

*Toby Tabachnick can be reached at [ttabachnick@pittsburghjewishchronicle.org](mailto:ttabachnick@pittsburghjewishchronicle.org).*

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