

ARTS & LEISURE

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Hemingway depicted in engrossing 'Papa'

By JACK ZINK
Theater Writer

Papa is a frequently engrossing new play about the swaggering real-life Ernest Hemingway, the man behind the prose who enjoyed being as colorful as the characters he invented.

That's a tall order to be carried out so deftly in a one-character drama. Playwright John DeGroot illustrates Hemingway at the age of 58, at home near Havana, Cuba before Castro's revolution. The flush of the author's greatest success — the Nobel Prize — is turning worrisome; Hemingway is headed into an emotional quagmire that will culminate four years later with suicide.

DeGroot has a knack for handling the conventions of the one-man show, pruning them in most cases to bare essentials while zeroing in on Hemingway's human personality. The depiction of that character, by actor William Hindman, is likely to hold up as one of this season's finest theatrical performances.

Papa is not without its rough edges, generally found in the play's many scene transitions. Hemingway's tall tales are an appealing and effective conduit for a dramatic essay on the man himself, but there are innate problems shifting from one to another. Some are a bit contrived, as is DeGroot's tendency to pour his most stimulating material into a confrontational approach to the audience itself.

Most of those burrs already bear the mark of honing by director Philip M. Church. More filing is likely, and looks promising. Church's direction gives us more than a man delivering a monologue, as is the case of the trend-setting *Mark Twain Tonight*. DeGroot's script has a dramatic form that allows Church to cre-

THEATER REVIEW

Papa

One-man show depicts author Ernest Hemingway spinning tales of his adventures.

Credits: By John deGroot. Directed by Philip M. Church. With William Hindman.

Through next Sunday at the Colony Theatre, 1040 Lincoln Road at Lenox, Miami Beach. Curtain 2:30 p.m. today and next Sunday, 8:30 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday. Tickets \$15.75. Call BASS, 741-3000 (Broward), 734-2277 (Palm Beach).

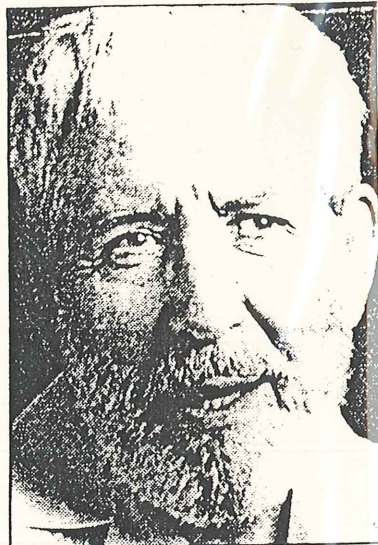
ate an acting environment for Hindman to move around in. It's solid playmaking with emotional textures that point to — and eventually attain — a climax.

The scenario has the author arrive home to unexpected visitors — the audience. Hemingway commences to entertain us as if he'd merely stumbled into a gang of cronies. Hindman parlays the character well as *Papa* recalls the events that inspired Hemingway's florid stories without resorting to or expounding on the books themselves.

On only three occasions does Hindman go to the bookshelf, and then for only brief passages.

Amid the braggadocio and embellished accounts of personal adventures, *Papa* features sudden, penetrating revelations of private details that lock the character portrait into place.

For the most part Hindman's evolution through *Papa* is a slow deterioration. Hemingway gets himself gassed up during the course of the evening; it's a gimmick that lends easy plausibility



Bill Hindman

to the release of the man's frustrations at life, at his upbringing and at success itself.

The stories range from an early, disturbing account of Hemingway's near-death from an artillery shell in World War I to rejection by his parents as a "pornographer," and to simple chats about the tricks of deep-sea fishing.

The crucial material is held together with neat reflections in the second act on material we've heard in the first. One of the most poignant is a late "confession" about Hemingway's first affair, that erases a myth about his wartime nurse.

The Colony Theater production, *Papa's* world premiere in a full staging, is staged with economy without looking spartan. Dean Kennedy's set suggests a cluttered room watched over by trophies from Hemingway's hunting expeditions. Dominating the stage, however, is a simple window hung in mid air through which subtle lighting changes affect the hue of the play itself.

Punctuating various tales, and underscoring the character's emotional outbreaks, is a haunting incidental music and sound effects score by Dorothy E. Hindman, the actor's daughter. It's a nice finishing touch to a consistently interesting drama.