

# Odd Fellows' Labor Of Love At Bujese

By Roger Ziegler

"There is no alternative theater," declares Maria Pessino, director of Odd Fellows Productions in a light Spanish accent that reminds one of her native Cuba. "There is only good theater and bad theater."

The difference is that good theater can happen anywhere and bad theater happens everywhere. Fortunately Pessino, who is Odd Fellows Productions, doing everything from public relations (with the help of Kenny Mann) to setting up folding chairs, has spent the better part of four years developing non-traditional "anywhere" theater and has a well-deserved reputation for transforming straw into gold.

Working with very limited budgets and changeable theater spaces, Pessino has put on plays in television studios, art galleries, an attic, and, with any luck, a park or backyard or anyplace that will hold a stage and 50 to 60 seats.

The latest incarnation of Odd Fellows will be at the Arlene Bujese Gallery in East Hampton this weekend where they will present a revival of Paula Vogel's affecting drama *The Baltimore Waltz*. Based on the playwright's own experience with her brother who died of AIDS, Vogel uses fantastical situations and humor to address an extremely personal story.

## Specialized Niche

The play whirls between the past,

present, and future, sometimes in the same scene, as it tries to make sense of the devastating loss of a loved one by using a humorous fictitious disease all our mothers warned us about.

The play met the challenge at Odd Fellows Productions — finding very good plays that will inhabit a specialized niche, a low-cost, small cast, and highly adaptable. *Baltimore Waltz* fit perfectly.

"Because we have no permanent home, the first thing I have to do when planning a new production is to find a space — LTV, Stephen Talkhouse, wherever," said Pessino in the tiny Odd Fellows offices in East Hampton. "After that, I read many plays and decide on one that will fit the space I've found. It is a bit reverse, but it is the only way we can do it."

Once the parameters of space and cost are affixed, Pessino then looks for "great plays." According to Pessino, *Baltimore Waltz* fit that bill. She says she found herself laughing and crying while reading the work and knew instantly this was the one she wanted to do.

## Labor of Love

One unusual quirk in producing the play at the Arlene Bujese art gallery is that the gallery is open for business during the day, so everything from the chairs to the lighting to the set itself has to be struck every night and then set up again the next evening, turning



Christine Newman Photo

Diane Grotlee and James Walsh in *The Baltimore Waltz*.

everyone from the actors to the producers and volunteers into tech people.

"It is a very democratic production," said Pessino, "and very much a labor of love."

At Odd Fellows the emphasis is on original works, the kind that take you out of yourself and put you back in, with any luck, changed slightly for the better. Pessino and her troupe are proving that the East End is a welcome home for many types of art and theater. To the casual mind, the Hamptons may be merely a liquor-soaked Summer party, but those willing to look beneath the seasonal veneer will see that

the East End is really held together by a deep-rooted appreciation for high culture, wide nature, and long history.

*Baltimore Waltz* will star the professional talents of Diane Grotke, James Walsh, and Lane Luckert and is directed by Pessino. The play won the 1991 Obie Award when it premiered at the Circle Repertory Theater in New York and will be shown at the Arlene Bujese Gallery at 66 Newtown Lane in East Hampton starting tomorrow and running Thursdays through Sundays until August 20.

All shows are at 8 p.m. Call 324-2823 for tickets.