

Spotlight

CONTINUED FROM PRECEDING PAGE

he says, "though a few are larger and some of the smaller works may be performed slightly less often."

Only two of the 10 come from out-of-town writers. Canadian Michael Tremblay's "Damnee Manon Sacree Sandra," which opened last week, is an eerie, slightly experimental performance piece between two alternating characters, one a religious fanatic clad in funereal attire and the other a sex-crazed drag queen. The second play is a new musical version of Paul Monette's classic novel of California in the 1970s, "Taking Care of Mrs. Carroll." That features a book by Martin Casella, the book writer for the Broadway-bound musical "Paper Moon," and songs by the team of David Mettee and Georgia Holof, whose credits include "A . . . My Name is Alice." Zak directs the show, which opens July 14.

But the majority of works are homegrown projects steered through workshops and into completion by the cadre of directors Bailiwick engages to produce works each year. "We're still very much a director's theater," says Zak. Joel G. Fink, Anne Marie Akin, Lindsay Porter, Scott Cooper, Elizabeth Lucas and Brian Gary Kirst are all on the team.

There is more of an emphasis on work about women this year. Rebecca Ranson's "The Light Keepers," based on journals and letters, tells of two women lovers who ran the Lake Michigan Light House in the late 19th Century. Alexandra Billings' new comedy "Amanda



Photo by Jennifer Girard

Jay Aubrey and Carolyne Haycraft are in the Pride Series' "Damnee Manon Sacree Sandra."

and Eve" is loosely based on the movie "Adam's Rib," about two lovers who end up arguing on opposite sides of a courtroom spousal abuse case. "The First Lady's Lady" is a new opera about Eleanor Roosevelt and her close woman friend.

Scott Cooper's take on "A Midsummer Night's Dream" uses Shakespeare's text but alters his characters' sexuality, leans on the ambivalence of the fairies and features lesbians as the so-called Mechanicals, who put on the play within a play. And "The Club" is a black comedy about a drag queen who gathers HIV-positive men to make panels for the AIDS quilt.

The annual series has had its share of critical knocks over the years, as well as mixed results. "My Night With Reg," from an earlier festival, recently

opened in New York to devastating reviews.

"We want to keep leading the way," Zak says. "One of the joys of being a small regional theater is that you can take chances. Everybody believes strongly in the freedom to fail. We've actually had the most disappointing results when we did something that we thought would be commercial but we weren't excited about aesthetically. Not everything has to be a blockbuster."

Funded with a budget of \$75,000, featuring some 85 actors overall, the Pride Series has moved from a lone beacon on gay life to an ongoing chronicle of its changes and evolutions.

"People are getting older and they're living, no longer poised on the abyss. This is a community that feels healthy, and we're trying to reflect that," Zak says.



Id/Ego Productions, the after-hours spoof folks who brought us an all-female version of "Bonanza" and a sendup of "Valley of the Dolls," are back and are taking on a cult horror classic.

"He sings, he dances, he consumes," go the promos for "The Blob the Musical." That's right, the gruesome tale of the overgrown, blood-red silly putty gradually eating up just about everyone in town but a young Steve McQueen is now a late-night musical, opening at 11 p.m. Friday at Live Bait Theatre, 3914 N. Clark St.

The show, running Fridays and Saturdays through Aug. 2, is adapted by David Sinker, with music by Todd Scales and lyrics by both. Id/Ego artistic director Cynthia Desmond is producer. For tickets: 773-871-1212.