

AIDS Drama Opens July 19

Larry Kramer's searing drama "The Normal Heart" will be Theatrefest's second Studio production of the summer, opening Wednesday, July 19 and playing through Sunday, July 30.

"We're presenting classic comedy, dance and Broadway musicals

on our Mainstage," says Producer/Artistic Director Phil Oesterman. "I want very much to explore inventive, controversial plays in our Studio Theatre that offer provocative, timely ideas."

"The Normal Heart" tells the story of very private lives caught up

in the heartrending ordeal of the most terrifying medical crisis today: the AIDS epidemic. During the early 1980's the virus was just being discovered, Kramer's explosive play dramatizes what actually happened as forces were organized to research and combat the disease.

At the center of the story is a vibrant young man named Ned Weeks, who challenges the media and the political authorities to join him in the fight against AIDS. As he wages a one-man war he not only learns about fighting, but about love itself. And about how important it is to fight for love, no matter what the odds.

"This is a play that's been hugely successful," stated Oesterman. "Critics have heaped praise on it and audiences have flocked to see it on both coasts, and in several cities in between."

Film star Brad Davis led the cast in the original New York Shakespeare Festival production, followed by Joel Grey in a rare dramatic role.

Newsweek called "The Normal Heart" "an extraordinary play! It is bracing to hear so much passion and intelligence." The New York Times labeled it "the most outspoken play around," and the Daily News said "you are bound to come away moved." The Chicago Tribune added praise for the story, saying "the confrontations are truly dramatic; when it zeroes in on its love story, it becomes tremendously touching."

Phil Oesterman will direct "The Normal Heart" for Theatrefest.

Oesterman has assembled a cast of New York and regional theatre veterans, including Stephen Bradbury, Jerry Griffin, Brian Hugh O'Neill, Alfred Schmitz, Elizabeth Sterns, and Craig Wroe. Joining these professional actors will be Brian Schnipper, Jeffrey Wingfield, and John Wooten, students in the theatre program at Montclair State.

Theatrefest is supported by the School of Fine and Performing Arts at Montclair State College, and is

THE MONTCLAIR TIMES (N.J.), THURSDAY, JULY 13, 1989