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GenX

The magic of theater allows this woman to stop time and hold onto her youth, if just for a moment; for Wilner, time marches on, and heavy responsibilities follow close on its heels.

"You're given a lot of leeway in your 20s," the playwright observed. "If you're not sure what you want to do with your life, or if you do something reckless or stupid, people tell you, 'It's OK, you're young.' In your 30s, all that freedom ends. People start asking, 'Are you married? Are you having kids? Do you have a good job?' A lot more is expected of you."

At some point, the characters in Robb Badlam's play "Slop-Culture" will begin to feel the pressure of those expectations. For now, though, these GenXers are happy to sit around the apartment complaining about their temp jobs and speculating on the unseen sex lives of their favorite cartoon characters.

Only Danielle, who needs to recount a significant childhood experience on an application for a real job, seems disturbed by the fact that the whole of her youth can be captured within the confines of a 13-inch TV screen. Having frittered away her formative years on "Gilligan's Island" and "Scooby Doo," she

Actors Theatre of Louisville

Located at 316 W. Main St. in downtown Louisville, Ky. Upcoming productions include "Nixon's Nixon," April 6-May 30, and "Pump Boys and Dinettes," May 5-June 6. Tickets for next year's Humana Festival will go on sale the first week of February 2000. Call (502) 584-1205.

laments, "I am half Italian and I need help ordering spaghetti at the Olive Garden!"

Badlam, born and raised in Ogdensburg, N.Y., conceived "Slop-Culture" while pondering his own lack of anything that might be called ethnicity. "It suddenly hit me: My cultural heritage is 25 years of bad TV," he said, smiling.

The playwright added that twentysomethings should revel in this shared history — however artificial and sad it might be — rather than feeling guilty about all that time wasted in front of the tube. Furthermore, because Badlam hates to read, he insisted that television made him a writer. (That and playing with his still-cherished "Star Wars" action figures.)

"We're trained to tell stories by watching TV," Badlam reasoned. "We see that stories have a begin-

ning, a middle and an end. Some of it is awful, obviously, but some of it is wonderful."

Those same words might be applied to this year's Humana Festival lineup as a whole, although the wonderful far outweighed the awful, and even the awful was at least interesting. "Cabin Pressure" by Ann Bogart and her SITI Company, regular visitors to Actors Theatre, was perhaps the most widely admired production, while David Rambo's more conventional "God's Man in Texas" seemed to be the script most likely to be picked up by other regional theaters.

The futures of the "Life Under 30" plays — and their playwrights — are less certain. Having had their scripts selected for this prestigious festival from more than 2,000 submissions, Wilner, Badlam and the others can enjoy at least some temporary visibility. They can knock on the doors of agents, TV and film production companies and yes, even theaters, with some hope of getting a hearing.

"They have a lot of opportunities," said ATL literary manager Michael Dixon, who devised the "Under 30" project with the theater's producing director Jon Jory to reach a new generation of viewers as well as writers. "I think this was a very encouraging immersion for these young playwrights into the profession," Dixon commented. "But the next step is up to them."