

THE 99-SEAT BEAT

Prompted to think about responsibility

BY PHILIP BRANDES

Ethics, shmethics. Who needs 'em nowadays? Read each day's headlines and our culture may seem like it's falling further down a slippery slope, but this week's promising selections in small theaters push back with plays that reaffirm the importance of moral responsibility and accountability, whether in politics, romance, the workplace or religion.

'Heart' divided in Atwater show

The essentials: When willful ignorance is no longer an option, does silence become a sin of complicity? In a premiere from Echo Theater Company and Circle X Theatre Company, Yusuf Toropov's metaphysical morality play draws on two Boston-area scandals from the early 1990s. A Catholic priest faces the ultimate test of faith when his loyalty to the church is pitted against his obligation to expose a sexual abuse cover-up, while the victims of a contaminated drinking water supply search for meaning.

Why this? Both theater companies — and Echo director Chris Fields in particular — specialize in hard-hitting contemporary dramas and innovative staging. The evocative script's twin story lines and multiple realities converge in something of a thematic cross between "Spotlight" and "A Civil Action," topped with a layer of Zen. "Even in the darkness," Fields says, "we are each of us capable of great good and of transcending the darkness that sometimes seems to surround us."

Details: At Atwater Village Theatre, 3269 Casitas Ave., Los Angeles. 8 p.m. Mondays, Fridays and Saturdays; 4 p.m. Sundays; ends April 22. \$20-\$34. (310) 307-3753, www.echotheatercompany.com



DARRETT SANDERS

A PRIEST (Matthew Gallenstein) faces a dilemma in "An Undivided Heart" by Echo and Circle X.