

TELEVISION

Love's labor's not lost on 'Life Times'

Locally written, acted and produced drama is such a rarity on television that I'd almost forgotten what it was like, so Randy Paris' "Life Times" comes along as a pleasant surprise.

Such a drama is also an expensive proposition, so it's not surprising that "Life Times" is basically a labor of love, one that involved the cooperation of the Seattle Arts Commission, Group W's public-access facilities, Channel 9, the Washington State Arts Commission and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists. The latter allowed the actors and others to donate their talents and energy to the production.

Paris was paid \$4,000 from the Seattle Arts Commission for his script, but he was about the only person involved in "Life Times" who received any money for his work.

"Life Times" began when an arts-commission jury chose Paris for its artist-in-residence program last year. Paris proposed writing a TV play that would be given a staged reading; Paris previously had received notice for "Southern Cross," a drama KING-TV did in 1981, possibly the last time drama was produced on local TV here.

As the project took shape, plans developed to produce it. The project eventually involved director Roberta Levitow; Group W donated equipment for shooting the drama; and Steve Winiger volunteered his time as cameraman and



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lighting designer. As the production got under way, various businesses and individuals volunteered the use of locations and other help. Channel 9 contributed editing-room time and equipment so Paris could edit the final tape.

While Channel 9 will air the hour-long "Life Times" at 2 p.m. April 1, cable subscribers will be able to view the play at 8 tonight, and again at 5:30 p.m. Monday and 8 p.m. Thursday, on public access (Channel 29 on both Viacom and Group W).

Paris has created a more promising dramatic situation than in "Southern Cross." "Life Times" concerns Mary, a newly widowed, middle-age woman, once an actress, whose involvement with a local theater group helps her begin a new life.

Paris has used William Saroyan's "The Time of Your Life" for a

theme that runs through the play: The theater company is producing the play and we learn Mary was once a promising young actress who appeared in a production of the play. In addition, the kinds of crises affecting the characters in the Saroyan play find their counterparts in the crises affecting some of the characters in "Life Times."

Rosa Kuring plays Mary, and it's often a thankless role in the sense that much of the time she simply has to appear stunned and withdrawn, waiting to be brought out of the shell her grief has created around her. Acting honors — for playing the most interesting character Paris wrote — go to Shirley Robertson, a delight as Elsie, one of those chatty, not-quite-elderly ladies who specialize in getting involved in other people's lives because not much is going on in their own. Robertson gives a winning performance, never allowing Elsie to become overbearing or too repetitious.

Also notable is Anne O'Connell, as a pushy supporter of the theater group who really wants to run the show and has trouble masking her disdain for others. Rob Burgess, who has the leading (and best) male role, portrays a young man who wants to be an actor but isn't sure he can make a career of it. Burgess' performance is uneven, but when he's on target he projects a winning charm.

Others in the cast include Rod Aird and Sazy Hunt as Mary's children; Tom O'Connell as a

theater customer; John Pendleton as the theater's manager; with Stephanie Shine, Bess Douthit and Jack Dutt in smaller roles.

"Life Times" looks very professional — the use of on-location shooting is done skillfully and imaginatively. The weakest aspect of the production is that it moves too slowly. Television viewers are used to a much snappier pace than Paris has given "Life Times" through his editing. The slower pace might work well for a live production, but for TV, "Life Times" often goes on long past the point where we've figured out the reason for a scene.

This hour easily could be edited down to a swifter 45-minute drama, particularly in the opening scenes, which could have been told far more economically than the later ones focusing on Mary's revitalization.

Still, "Life Times" is an entertaining production, above and beyond its rarity, and if you're unable to see it on public-access, it's well worth catching when Channel 9 airs it April 1.

Video notes: The good news, although NBC has yet to confirm it officially, is that "St. Elsewhere" has been renewed for next season... HBO repeats its funny "Not Necessarily the Movies" special that spoofs the Oscars at 11:30 tonight on cable... HBO also has a slight but interesting look at the Oscar process, "Racing for the Biggest Award," to be repeated at 7 a.m. and 3 p.m. tomorrow.