

POINTS OF VIEW

Theater snubs annual performance of arts

It's a celebration of the arts. It takes over the major buildings in the Birmingham community — its library, its churches, its schools, The Community House, its community theater, its ice arena — even JAX Car Wash.

And nearly 10,000 people of all ages, for a mere \$7 each, can attend performances ranging from the classical guitar of Paul Vondiziano in the chapel of St. James Episcopal church, to the mu-

sic and humor of Ron Coden and Josh White Jr. in the ballroom of The Community House to the tears-to-the-eyes notes of Ortheia Barnes, as she mixes Motown, jazz and gospel in the Seaholm High School gym.

Their performances raise the caliber of New Year's Eve to new heights for whole families, teens, young marrieds, singles and empty-nesters looking for an uplifting way to usher in another year.

"We heard a lot about the high level of the performances," said Zina Kramer, the hardworking executive director of First Night, that just finished its third year run.

And once again, the Birmingham Theatre wasn't a part of it.

After declining to add its clout that shaky — will anybody come? — first year, theater owner Harry Nederlander acknowledged First Night's success and pledged to be a part of it the next year.

But Nederlander has problems do-



JUDITH DONER BERNE

nating his services to a community that he says doesn't support the Birmingham Theatre. And so, that following year he wasn't willing to give up the New Year's Eve show or even to make the theater available for children's performances earlier in the day — at an affordable price.

So when I read Free Press theater critic Lawrence DeVino's review of the current play at the Birmingham Theatre, which gave its second performance there New Year's Eve, I couldn't

help but feel a little sweet revenge. "Two into One" at the Birmingham Theatre easily could be the worst play of our half of the 20th Century," DeVine leads off.

Then, "Amazed opening night playgoers at the Birmingham can say they were present at a show that makes 'Moose Murders' look like Oscar Wilde."

And, "A viewer at the Birmingham will might suspect the poor cast was making this stuff up as they went along."

But life doesn't always go smoothly. As it turns out, what's not divine to DeVine is divine to Observer & Eccentric reviewer Barbara Michals.

As you can read in today's entertainment section, Michals loves the play by British playwright Ray Cooney, calling it a well-directed, well-acted "Feast of Laughter."

Meanwhile back at First Night, there were not such obvious discrepancies. Headliners, flutist Alexander Zonjic

and singer Barnes played to full and enthusiastic houses at Seaholm. So did the lesser known performers, such as the International Puppet Place which had youngsters laughing and yelling gleefully at the Baldwin Library.

Despite DeVine's review, and in keeping with Michals, the Birmingham Theatre has had its successes over the years. It is a definite cultural presence in Birmingham — with or without its first 'm' (See related photo).

It would be nice if in future years it would help perpetuate First Night by lending its premises — at least for afternoon performances of children's plays.

That might even translate into future Birmingham Theatre attendance. To paraphrase the "Be Kind to Your Parents" song, "One day you may grow up and find you're a theater-goer, too."

Judith Doner Berne is assistant managing editor for the Oakland County editions of the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. She can be reached at 644-1100, Ext. 242.



Birmingham Theatre Marquee

Columns draw concern, complaints from readers

Today's column will feature my reactions to some of my "readers." (I hesitate to call them reactionaries.) One reactor is an AT&T vice president for public relations, no less. Since the expense of his salary is passed on to the public via your phone bill, we can hope that he is indeed the public's protector rather than merely the protector of AT&T's image.

He expressed the concern that in an October column I blamed AT&T for the impending area code split between Wayne and Oakland counties as a further symbolic division between the core city and suburbs. I had gleaned this misinformation from a metro daily and neglected to verify it. I later learned that, rather than AT&T, the responsible party is Bellcore — Michi-

gan Bell's New Jersey research arm — which acted on the advice of Consumer Market Analysts in Birmingham.

Another reactor called to complain that I had confused him by saying in a December column that I'd "been brooding about the blindly partisan voters who cast votes against Democrat Jon Buller for state Representative and yet voted for Proposal C, which his opponent supported and he opposed."

That passage should have read: "and yet voted against Proposal C." A third reactor wrote to advise me that former presidential candidate Pat Buchanan is "pusillanimous" and "pulchritudinous" (as well as "platitudeous," which I called him in November). This letter-writer was making fun of my use of alliteration and big words,



JOHN TELFORD

and I confess she sent me scurrying to my dictionary. Buchanan may be "pusillanimous," but he sure isn't "pulchritudinous." (I should add that another reactor called to praise that column, which proclaimed language as our greatest creation.)

A fifth reactor scolded me for suggesting that Ross Perot is a potential demagogue. She then added that she hadn't been particularly enchanted with my "arrogant attitude" when I was assistant superintendent of Rochester Schools, and she's even less so now that she continuously has to look at my "leering, bewhiskered mug" in her Observer & Eccentric newspaper. (At least I'm getting read.)

A sixth reactor complained that I credited the city of Rochester Hills with contributing money to the Oakland Center for Open housing last year when actually it was the city of Rochester that did it. He's right — and Rochester contributed again this year. It's time her sister city followed suit.

An seventh reactor, demanding to

know why I'm always slamming the state government for underfunding education, cited Representative Richard Posthumus' claim that the Legislature has "continued" to make education its top priority. Posthumus' assertion is even more preposterous than the notion that a "vice president for public relations" exists solely to serve the public.

John Telford, a Rochester Hills resident, most recently was assistant superintendent in the Rochester School District. He previously was executive director for secondary education in the Plymouth Canton district. To leave a message for him from a touchtone phone, dial 953-2047 mailbox 1879.

LETTERS

Thanks for story

I would like to thank you on behalf of Santa and the children Santa was able to contact recently. The article in the Observer let parents know about the North Pole Hotline. Santa received over 300 requests for telephone calls.

In the past, the program was promoted by the distribution of fliers through the public schools. This year, due to a change in school policy, Santa was unable to distribute fliers through the schools.

Due to your quick article, followed by Santa's calling registration card in the paper, we were able to make the holiday season a little more exciting for the Farmington and Farmington Hills children that Santa called.

Thank you again and Happy Holidays.

One of Santa's Elves

Column an insult

I have lived in the Farmington area for 20 years. Never have I read a more obnoxious "point of view" than the one written by Jeff Counts on Dec. 28 entitled "Nature Nuts are self-serving, greedy people."

What was the point of the article? Why is he asking how woods and wetlands always receive attention? And that constitutes "landscape racism" in his words? Perhaps he should find out why they are so valuable.

He mentions the beauty of a farm field. I would certainly take an abandoned farm over any of the strip malls we have. Maybe Counts didn't live around here 20 years ago, and hasn't seen all the trees that have been cut, and all the development using up every last piece of land.

He complains about the fanatics in Sierra Club and Greenpeace. Does he have any idea how much land has been saved through legislation and hard work by Sierra Club members?

Yes, Greenpeace is extreme, but there are times when that is the only thing that works. Thank goodness there are people who care enough about the planet to work through Sierra Club, or Greenpeace or other environmental groups or our future would be bleak.

Maybe he feels animals aren't worth saving. Does he realize that half of the animals on our planet will be extinct in another 30 years? Has he ever heard of the food chain?

Does he realize how critical it is to our life on this planet? Counts goes on to say he wants to live at peace with the land. I'm afraid if he doesn't care what happens to it there won't be much peace. Land that has been degraded doesn't have much to offer.

Is Counts also saying we did not displace the Indians? I don't see many around Farmington today. He calls this "obvious ultra liberal tripe."

I call it the truth. But weren't these Native Americans ingenious for their methods of living on the earth, after we placed them on the most God-forsaken pieces of vacant land we could find? The Native Americans did the best they could do with what we gave them.

This article is an insult to our intelligence. The author could certainly benefit from the excellent course in Environmental Science offered at OCC, as the true significance of these subjects has escaped him.

If Counts plans to be around to "listen to the spirit of the land" he better join with the Sierra Club or Nature Conservancy, or there won't be any land left to listen to.

Carol A. Mortensen, Farmington Hills

On ice arena

This letter is in response to the headlines of the Dec. 28 issue regarding the ice arena.

There is a definite need in the area for an ice arena. However, I personally don't see the location being a problem. We have plenty of land within our parks that may accommodate this project. Why can't this facility be part of our own parks and recreation division?

The city needs to return back to the days when we had a community center that would allow all activities to be combined into one location/building. And the remark made by Costick, that the location should be near a freeway, is absurd.

There isn't even an immediate exit ramp off the freeway. Don't we have enough traffic exiting at Orchard Lake already?

I think it is a shame that we can't use our resources to better Heritage Park. You can't even feed the geese, or skate on that small pond which is plenty of ice for small children, you can't ride bikes, and there aren't enough restrooms for a park of that size.

If this project does pan out, I hope the admission costs can be kept to a minimum unlike Farmington Hills' only private roller skating rink.

Clarice Waldecker, Farmington Hills

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