

# Joan Bennett personifies Hollywood glamour

By BARBARA MICHALS

Joan Bennett—the name conjures up images of Hollywood's Golden Age and its glittering, glamorous stars of the '30s and '40s.

With that aura of stardom worn like a regal mantle, Miss Bennett was in Bloomfield Hills last weekend to do a benefit for the new Will-O-Way Center for the Performing Arts.

The benefit was part of a fund-raising drive to build a new stage for the Kingswood Will-O-Way Theatre to accommodate live drama as well as classic films. Plans are to present 13 stage productions annually, each featuring an established star and a supporting cast of local semiprofessional and student actors.

In recent years, Miss Bennett has done frequent stock appearances in "Butterflies Are Free" and will return to Kingswood Will-O-Way in the fall to star in "Butterflies." At the July 31 benefit, Miss Bennett performed a short dramatic scene from "Butterflies" with Stephen Zygmunt of the Farmington Players.

From her home in Scarsdale, N.Y., Miss Bennett brought with her a copy of her favorite film "Scarlet Street," which she also considers her best acting work. The film is owned by a European company and has never been distributed in the United States.

SHE COSTARRED in "Scarlet Street" with Edward G. Robinson and portrayed a young girl who takes advantage of an older man's affections in order to gain money for her cadid boyfriend. The character has a hard-boiled exterior but a conscience.

Following the special screening of "Scarlet Street," Miss Bennett responded to written questions from the audience.

The decision to enter show business was made for her by her father, noted actor Richard Bennett.

"I was married at 15, had a baby at 17 and divorced at 18," she explained. "My father suggested I return to New York and do a play with him."

The play was "Jurnegan" in 1928, and it launched a career that spans 50 years and includes more than 70 films, numerous stage appearances and two television series.

Along with her actress sisters Constance and Barbara, Miss Bennett was the fifth generation of actors on her mother's side. She recently published a book, "The Bennett Playbill," about her famous acting family.

OF HER OWN four daughters, only one ever wanted to try show business. "She tried for three years; but it was too tough. So she gave up and got married," Miss Bennett said.

Her most demanding role? Raising her four daughters while maintaining her career. Miss Bennett replied with a chuckle.

She repeatedly named Spencer Tracy as her favorite co-star. They made four pictures together, including "Father of the Bride" and "Father's Little Dividend." Among her other favorite films she named "Little Women," "Manhunt," "Trade Winds" and "Woman in the Window."

"I doubted my ability a great deal in the beginning," Miss Bennett confided to the many aspiring young actors in the audience. "I had no training."

"I would go to one end of our apartment and try to say my lines loud enough for my father to hear at the opposite end of the apartment."

While she greatly prefers stage acting, Miss Bennett readily admitted that Hollywood has been much more

lucrative for her. Recently she has done mainly dinner theater and summer stock, but a new film, a thriller called "Suspicion," was just released.

REFERRING to her five years on the popular daytime television serial "Dark Shadows," Miss Bennett ex-

claimed, "It was horrible! I only did it because I didn't expect it to last, and I was glad when it finished. I'll never do another soap opera," she said adamantly. "It's just too demanding on your life."

At a reception in the theater lobby, Miss Bennett sat enthroned like vis-

iting royalty and signed autographs and shook hands. She still looked beautiful and regal despite the advancing years but with a touch of fragility. The Kingswood Will-O-Way Theatre will present "An Evening with Cyril Richard" in a second benefit performance at 8 p.m. Sunday.

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## Live symphony hard to handle

By CORINNE ABATT

There's probably some old Chinese proverb which fits the situation the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and guest conductor Karl Haas found themselves in last Sunday evening.

Just at this moment, it doesn't come to mind, but it would run something like "Man who is successful in one career shouldn't jump into another in public view without adequate preparation."

The point being that Karl Haas, revered radio personality and foster father of Detroit area classical music culture, found himself in deep water (hot, too) as conductor of the Meadow Brook Sunday concert.

Haas's verbal program notes were given in his pleasant easy-going style, but even these could have been improved upon—a trifle too patronizing for some tastes. There were too many "as I'm sure you all know, Debussy was born in 1862" kinds of comments. Haas also made an assumption that he needn't relate the "Samson and Delilah" story because most of the audience already knew it.

Well, maybe, but I'll wager Jimmy the Greek wouldn't give very good odds on the number who were familiar with the story behind the Saint Saeus aria which Maureen Forrester sang.

Haas has, indeed, made major contributions to music, but before the concert was over, he and the orchestra and at least a portion of the audience knew it was not going to be before a live symphony orchestra.

Ms. Forrester was practically unflappable during a group of Dvorak Gypsy Songs in which Haas lost his place as well as his rhythm, which, at his best, was never great.

A contralto who made her debut with the Metropolitan Opera in 1975, Ms. Forrester brought lovely control and a high level of sensitivity to Dvorak's songs of wandering, homeless people.

To show their admiration for a fine trouper who performed well under adverse conditions, the orchestra members gave their own accolades (bows tapped on music stands) at the end of her performance.

Haas had an interesting story to tell about Aaron Copland who, although he has used America's wilderness and countryside culture as a basis for many compositions, was actually born in Brooklyn.

Symphony personnel who arranged this concert could possibly consider using Haas in an adjunctive position, narrator or something else, in concert. But conductor of the orchestra? Frankly no.

Like all creative skills, the position of leadership on the podium is one that takes years and years of experience, plenty of smarts and cool, plus all of the expected things—rhythm, good memory and fine understanding of the orchestra.

Pops conductor Richard Hayman once said at a Detroit Symphony Orchestra cabaret concert that this orchestra was so skilled they could follow any direction.

But, direction there must be. A lot of high school orchestra conductors could have done a better job last Sunday.

How about it? Let's stick with the pros.

## 3 specials at pavilion

Three early-week specials are offered by Meadow Brook Music Festival, starting Monday and including two standing-room-only concerts by singer-actor Kris Kristofferson.

The third special attraction is an open rehearsal Wednesday afternoon with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. Guest conductor Otto-Werner Mueller will rehearse the orchestra for its regular Thursday evening classical concert, which will include Copland's Appalachian Spring Suite and Stravinsky's Puccinella Suite. Garrick Ohlsson, pianist, is guest soloist. Kristofferson and Rita Coolidge with Billy Shaw were originally scheduled for a single concert Tuesday evening. Pavilion seats were sold out so

quickly that festival management arranged a second Kristofferson concert, back-to-back with the originally scheduled one, for Monday evening. A few lawn tickets were still available, said Leon Petrus, festival managing director.

Tickets are still available for the Wednesday afternoon open rehearsal of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. Two of the specials begin at 8:30 p.m. and the open rehearsal begins at 1 p.m.

Meadow Brook Festival concerts are presented in the open-air Baldwin Pavilion on the Oakland University campus. Further information is available from festival offices at 377-2010.

## Students performing

Amateur thespians who studied at Cranbrook Theatre School this summer will stage "The Enchanted" Friday and Saturday in Cranbrook's outdoor Greek Theatre, 400 Lone Pine Road, Bloomfield Hills.

Show time each evening is 8:15 p.m. To reserve tickets, at \$2 each, call 644-9968.

Cast for "The Enchanted," a drama exploring the eternal struggle between forces of idealism and reality as a young woman moves from the fantasy world of youth into a world of reality, includes Mary Louise West, Katherine Kast, Karen Perles, Rusty Whitcomb, Paul Giampetroni, Ingo Rautenberg, all of Bloomfield Hills; Cheryl Webster of West Bloomfield;

Joseph Vanden Busche of Troy; Ann Bowerman of Birmingham; Amy Silverman, Heidi Rose and Darlene Lantz of Southfield; Donna Rezek of Oak Park; Karen Foran of Dearborn Heights; Gregory Mach of Lake Orion; Donovan Shand of Franklin; Glen Sevek of Madison Heights; Anna Barker of Sterling Heights; Rocco Guirlanda of Livonia; Steve Shewak of Farmington Hills; Kevin Barry of Pleasant Ridge; and Mark Myatt of Utica.

Actors and actresses all are junior high school, high school and college students.

Cranbrook Theatre School, now ending its 38th season, is sponsored by Cranbrook Educational Community.