

# Master storyteller writes for the Max Davey Singers

By CORINNE ARATT

Meeting a guy like Lan O'Kun for the first time is a lot like having a slug from the fountain of youth. He is charged with the joy of being a writer and the sparks go out in all directions.

O'Kun was in Farmington Hills recently to talk with Max and Margaret Davey about a script for the Max Davey Singers Christmas show.

A highly successful writer based in New York City, O'Kun wrote for Barbara Streisand for eight years, did the book, music and lyrics for Hallmark's "Littlest Angel," the 15-time audience-pleaser for the TV series, and wrote "Love American Style" and "Apple's Way."

He also did the "America" script for the Daveys, but hadn't seen the group in action until he was here this month when Steve Allen was the guest star.

"I DON'T think a talented group should be stuck in a closet," he told the couple. "That unique thing, this very sweet thing, should be heard."

While he was not about to reveal any of his ideas for the Christmas show, there are a few things to lay money on. It won't be super-oh-so-Las Vegas polished. "I'm for whammy, man. Amazing, wonderful things can be said through whammy. If I can make somebody laugh and think at the same time—then I've done it. I'm interested in saying something of importance that will influence."

The messages may be there, but they will be carried to beautiful, little packages, for O'Kun is a master storyteller who reaches for the memorable moment rather than a preacher who sermonizes.

"I am thrilled being a writer. Except for a ball player (he once played third base for a New York Yankee farm club) I never wanted to be anything but a writer."

HE HAS a high regard for talent and places Streisand close to the top of the list. The first song he wrote for her was "Kiss Me" and it sold a million copies. "She would take a song of mine she hadn't seen before I would play and she would sing—and I would cry. You see, I hear a song in my head as I write it, but when a great artist like Streisand sings it for the first time, I hear it back more wonderfully."

Although O'Kun's father died when he was 15, he was very influential in plotting the course of a successful career. "My father told me that you can't get through life without learning to play lose."

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ball, so I learned. Then he told me you can't get through life without playing the piano, so I learned that, too. I used to play the piano at school assemblies when my father was a junior high school teacher."

Saying that the theater is in his heritage, he adds: "My grandmother was a famous concert pianist in Kansas and her father had a theater. The Chas. came on. I came from a long line of people who had an interest in theater. My father was a brilliant lyricist, but he only heard one song I wrote."

By the time he was 14, O'Kun was writing songs for money. He attended the high school for music and art in New York City and later Syracuse University. Many of his closest friends from those days have made names for themselves in the arts.

HE IS MARRIED to Shari Lewis's young-

er sister, Barbara. His association with Shari began when she was in the junior high and he was Mr. O'Kun's little son who came to play the piano.

Later, she asked him to write her an act.

"What do you do?" he asked.

She replied, "I'm a dancer and a magician."

He reminisces about his early days as a writer for radio and television in New York City and his realization of the "power of TV," and the moment when he said to himself, "That's what I want, this medium."

He speaks of his script for a series in England, "Tales of the Riverbank."

"It's now being shown in 10 countries and has been translated into 20 languages—that's a little mind-blowing."

It was Shari Lewis who suggested the



LAN O'KUN

Daveys contact O'Kun to do a script and only after he heard the tapes did he consent, saying, "I love doing musical work."

Shari, O'Kun's very presence has had a strong, positive effect on the Daveys. He is vital, he is talented—and he likes what he hears.

## Craftsman's frustration leads to 'Show and Sell'

By LORRAINE MCKEN

The frustration of a Farmington woman who ran into a dilemma trying to market her crafts turned into an idea that has led to the opening of "Show and Sell" scheduled for July 25.

Craftsman Helen Westenberg, of 2808 Waterloo Court, says she is going to try her hand at being a rental agent. For all those others like me with a basement full of hand-crafted items who want a nice place to display them.

Mrs. Westenberg rattled off all of the available outlets for craftsmen, all of which she found disappointing.

"Barns are excellent. They start in October and get to be too much. By December you're tired of them, and the owners are the ones looking to make money," she said.

The best word she could find for her first market was "Lousy. And when you spend a lot of time on your craft, you want a nice setting for them."

She ruled thumbs down on the outdoor market. "When it rains, or the weather turns to 100 degrees, you're stuck," she said.

As for the supermart-and-craft center, she said, "You and your little display can get lost amongst maybe 100 exhibitors with ramshackle that's displayed as one big cluttered hedge-podge."

SHOW AND SELL will be located at 2808 Outer Drive in Dearborn, in what Mrs. Westenberg calls as a "well-maintained business district with a lot of pedestrian traffic."

She will rent table and/or floor space by the day or week so she has a constant changing of merchandise against a "very attractive coordinated background. It will be a very well planned shop created to display the crafts to their best advantage," she said.

Her scheduling will be such that "I don't have ten parties showing macramé at the same time, which will certainly be a benefit to both the customer as well as the seller," she said.

The interior of the shop has been planned to be completely portable, to allow persons to leave the control of space necessary for their particular craft. Or, she could accommodate an entire art show for a group, for example, with the portable

Nardineers are eager travelers

The Nardineers, a senior citizens group from North Park United Methodist Church, planned several special trips for the summer.

The next one on the busy schedule will be July 24, a day's outing to Channing for a performance on the downtown Square during the Summer Arts Festival.

Three buses will leave the church at eleven AM and head off about midday. The 120 travelers plan to have dinner at the Trinity United Methodist Church in Channing. The bus will return after the evening performance. The shortest trip is an annual event for the Nardineers.

Earlier this summer, 40 group members went to Windsor overnight for the Windsor Festival celebration. In August there will be a picnic picnic at the church and a trip to Tiger Stadium. September, the regular twice a month meetings resume with a number of special events still in the planning.

walls, tables and peg boards, all color coordinated for Show and Sell.

Show window space will be let for those who wish to leave a sample of their craft with a telephone contact number.

SEE WILL ASK NO commission on sales. Renters will be responsible for their own display set up, tax liabilities, records, and such.

She will advertise her shop, but renters will be responsible for advertising their own wares, or special shows.

"The whole shop (30 feet wide by 65 feet long) is completely flexible and so versatile it could be used to sell just about anything," she said.

Mrs. Westenberg has been working toward getting the shop ready for the past six weeks with her husband, Robert, her 12-year-old daughter, Wendy and a brother-in-law, and is determined to open the doors July 25. "If I have to stock it myself," she said.

Her own crafts are confined to "just

about anything you can do with a sewing machine," she said.

She's finished the first window display this week, with two of her own 30-inch high Raggedy Ann dolls around some of Wendy's outgrown play furniture, "the only thing of mine that's there so far. I hope I'll be so busy being rental agent that I'll be the only thing," she said.

Mrs. Westenberg will take inquiries from potential renters during the day while she's working at the shop, at 322-5508, or at home, 477-5857.



HELEN WESTENBERG

## 'All Night Strut' captures '40s mood

By ETHEL SIMMONS

You're not likely to forget "The All Night Strut." It's a stylish, understated show that recaptures the mood of the '30s and '40s with nostalgic verve.

This easy evening, at Detroit's Music Hall through Aug. 1, previewed Wednesday before an audience of Music Hall regulars and "Strut" supporters from Cleveland where the show ran for a year.

Two girls and two guys make up an imaginative foursome, who belt out the songs. Some of the tunes are ones you well remember, either from real life back in those decades or from the late show and old 78-speed records.

"In the Mood" a Glenn Miller Band hit of 1939 really swings, with Elaine Faloutsos on lead vocal, and the cast jitterbugging in a wonderful way.

MS. PSIHOUNTAS has a voice that seems to bring back the '40s sound in all its innocent boldness. Her vocal range is startlingly displayed in a "Porgy & Bess Medley" she shares with Dean Hill.

Each singer has his or her own way with a song, and each of these versatile performers has a chance to shine. Dean Hill stirs memories of Cab Calloway's hi-di-hi, strutting his stuff with the group in "Minnie the Moocher" (1931) and '40s live.

Robert Chidsey is a romantic tenor, especially moving in the dreamstuff of a song like "There's a Thing That's Lost Your Soul for New York City." Laura Robinson is a rangy, elegant performer who sings out "Gimmie a Pigfoot and a Bottle of Beer," a Bessie Smith song from which the show's ti-

tle is taken, and who gets the foursome and audience moving with another tune's gospel sound.

The best numbers are not necessarily of best-remembered tunes. On some of these you can still hear the original recording playing in your head, and it's hard for the cast to compete with the remembered sound.

THE SINGERS stand in a row at floor mikes placed center stage. Their bodies turn and limbs rotate in those deliciously hypnotic motions reminiscent of '40s and '50s song choreography.

A marquee of lights and a dance pad's rotating silver ball overhead is the only stage setting, with a see-through curtain behind them screening the musicians.

Costumes are all striking black and white. The first act got the guys decked out in pinstripe suits, Ms. Faloutsos in a '40s style dress with peplum and Ms. Robinson in a satiny open-sleeved gown.

In Act II they go formal, the guys in tails and the girls in long dresses. One couple wears black, the other white for dramatic contrast. It's a rhinestone and satin-with-turban world.

The pace of the show varies from the fast-action numbers winding up with "I Don't Mean a Thing If It Ain't Got That Swing" to the slower ones like "Dream."

If some of the selections seem too tame, it's still a very nice way to spend a few hours. Music Hall's stage may not be as intimate a setting as desired, but this is still a terrific opportunity for Detroit area show-goers to see this hit song and dance revue put together by the multi-talented Fran Charnas.

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