

Community Theater... Advant Garde Or Not?

By SUE SHAUGHNESSY

What's community theater and where should it go?
There are as many answers to those ques-



A "HAIR" that will never see community theater stages.

Amusements

What's ACTA? ... Creative Brainstorming

What's ACTA?
ACTA is an organization more formally known as the American Community Theater Association and is one of the four divisions of the American Educational Theatre Association (AETA).

Members are fulltime professionals and volunteers from community and civic theater groups throughout the country. Every year the delegates meet in conjunction with the national AETA meeting.

ON THE EVEN numbered years the delegates participate in a "floating theater conference" for a portion of the convention week.

Three years ago the delegates toured the entire state of Minnesota and visited nine theaters and saw seven different shows.

Panel discussions were conducted on the air conditioned buses en route the various stops.

Last year the same type of conference was staged in the San Francisco area, while the AETA delegates met in Los Angeles.

This year the Association sponsored five regional theater festivals, Michigan participants in the mid-west festival in Omaha were from Dearborn and Kalamazoo.

A total of 49 plays were performed in the festivals which were judged on five successive weekends by Art Cole, president of ACTA and director of the Midwest (Texas) Community Theatre; Kay Flehr, co-author of the book "In Search of an Audience"; and Norman Nadel, cultural affairs editor of the Scripps-Howard Newspapers.

The winner of the festival—the Entr'Actors Guild of Worcester, Mass., is currently in Monaco presenting their production of Arthur Kopit's "Chamber Music" in the Fourth World Amateur Theatre Festival in Monaco.

In two years ACTA will stage a national amateur theater festival following state festivals. In four years the winner of the national festival will again go to Monaco to represent the United States in the International competition.

ACTA also hopes to provide a national clearing house on royalty costs for community theater productions. Local delegates were surprised to learn this week that the royalty costs were negotiable and that community theater groups throughout the country had been able to obtain a lower royalty fee simply by doing some bargaining.

Membership in ACTA is obtained through a membership in AETA. A year's membership is priced at \$17.50 for individuals and \$50 for an organization.

tions as there are people involved in community theater and they were continually discussed during last week's national meeting of the American Community Theatre Association (ACTA).

MAYBE the answer is different for each individual and each organization.

Obviously the play bill for a city-wide community theater organization in an area that has no professional theater must differ from that of an organization that competes with professional and semi-professional companies for an audience.

Representatives of the Spokane (Wash.) Civic Theater told the ACTA delegates that their organization provided the only live theater productions for a city of more than 170,000 people. The last time that a professional road company had come to Spokane was five years ago, according to the Civic Theater people.

Obviously this group feels an obligation to provide a balance of theatrical works—the classics and the contemporary; the traditional and the avant-garde.

Spokane with an annual budget of \$50,000 and a brand new \$350,000 theater runs into the same problems that local organizations encounter.

That's drawing an audience.

THIS PROBLEM isn't confined to the west coast.

Judy Pierson, president of the Livonia-Redford Guild, said that that group "can afford to do a play it wants to about every two or three years."

James Cavanaugh, a paid professional director for community theaters in Rochester, Minn., and Omaha, Neb., flatly states that "community theater must reflect and lead society. We must entertain, but that does not always mean that we amuse the audience," he says.

"Community theater must artistically and thoughtfully bring the best theater of today and yesterday to the community," Cavanaugh adds.

"Our job is not just to sell tickets," Cavanaugh says, "but to lead artistically in the theater arts."

STILL ANOTHER viewpoint on the role and function of community theater comes from Charles Stillwill, director of the Richmond (Va.) Community Theater.

"My aim in casting a play is to have one-third of the people in the cast who have never been in one of the group's productions," he says. "For this reason I insist on open cast-

ing because this is the only way that organizations can grow and develop."

All of the paid professionals believe that community theater should be innovative.

During a visit to the Farmington Players Barn the group was outspoken in the thought that the Players should stage a theater in the round production in the Barn rather than sticking to the traditional staging.

However, it should be noted that the Farmington Players consistently draw the best audiences of any of the local community groups and is probably the most financially solvent.

As the saying goes, you can't argue with success.

ARE ANY of the local community theater groups trying to lead their audiences into an appreciation of the new movements in theater?

There are three main community theater organizations in the area—the Farmington Players, the Livonia-Redford Theatre Guild and the Wayne Civic Players.

Frankly, the Farmington group is the least adventurous of the three but the group has one permanent theater in the area and can sell the tickets to fill their 170 seats.

Last year both the Wayne and Livonia-Redford groups staged Arthur Kopit's prize winner, "Oh Dad, Poor Dad." This play might not be the real avant-garde play, but it's an offbeat production for an amateur group to undertake.

The Livonia-Redford group opens their upcoming season with a new twist—one two acts staged in a cabaret setting in the Players' Building on Beech-Daly just south of Five Mile. The Guild's musical production is "Roar of the Greasepaint"—a more contemporary type of musical than the extravaganzas.

Wayne's season includes the Arthur Miller work, "The Crucible" which is certainly not in the traditional "John loves Mary" mold of community theater of 15 or 20 years ago.

Farmington opens its season with an experiment for the group, its first musical production. The group chose an old standard—"Once Upon A Mattress" but it's a big undertaking for an organization that has built an audience without musical productions.

Maybe the local groups aren't as innovative as the national delegates think community theater should be, but they do provide some bright indications of the forward movement of community theater.



A HARE that has been on community theater stages with nauseating frequency.

Resident Companies Gain AETA Voice

The formation of a provisional operating division for the resident university theatrical company of the American Educational Theatre Association was announced at the conclusion of the group's national convention this week.

Local participants in the division are the Ruberry Classic Company based at Wayne State University and the APA company of the University of Michigan. Named to the Division's Board

of Directors were Leonard Leone of WSU and Robert C. Schmitter of U-M.

The new division represents the growing number of resident theatre companies based at colleges and universities. The new organization will work to strengthen communication among the companies, arrange national auditions for advanced theater students and to promote liaison with other theater groups.

New Plays Offer Originality



Theater	Film	Industry Rating	Catholic Rating
Algiers Drive In Wayne Rd. opposite Westland	Goodbye Columbus Rosemary's Baby	R none	AIII C
Cinema I Cinema II Livonia Mall	Whatever Happened to Aunt Alice The Bridge At Remagen	M M	All none
Civic - Farmington	The April Fools	M	none
La Parisisen Ford and Middlebelt Garden City	Stiletto Lady In Cement	R R	B B
Mai Kai Farmington and Plymouth Rds., Livonia	Castle Keep	R	B
Penn Ponnaman Ave. Plymouth	Goodbye Columbus	R	AIII
Quo Vadis Warren and Wayne Rds. opposite Westland	Ice Station Zebra Grand Prix	G none	AI none
Quo Vadis Penthouse I	The Graduate	none	AIV
Quo Vadis Penthouse II	Doctor Zhivago	none	All
Terrace Plymouth Rd. east of Merriam, Livonia	Romeo and Juliet The Odd Couple	M none	AIV AIII

Representations of children's theatre movements from throughout the country were treated presentations of parts of five different children's plays during the first days of the current convention of the American Educational Theatre Association (AETA).

The readings were sponsored by the Children's Theatre Conference (CTC) a subdivision of the AETA. In attendance were directors and staff members of colleges and community children's theatre programs throughout the country.

All the works were original scripts and are among the 25 unpublished works annotated in a catalogue just published by CTC.

Thelma McDaniel, chairman



WILL the witch save Benji's dog?

of the program and a faculty member of the Eastern Michigan University speech and drama department, said that the program was to make the delegates aware that these scripts were available.

The five plays included adaptations of two children's classics—Tom Sawyer and Alice in Wonderland. Both of the adaptations were written by Virginia Koste, an EMU faculty member, and have been produced by the EMU children's theatre program.

In addition to these selections three plays treating new topics were presented.

One common element of the three productions was the problems of the child in dealing with the adult world. One character, Pippi Longstocking, comes beautifully with the two policemen who arrive to take her to an orphan's home.

She tells her friends that she takes care of herself and provides a beautiful parody of the daily "It's time to go to bed scene" that she wins the heart of every child—no matter what age—in the audience.

Another character, Benji, deals with two witches who say they aren't witches in an effort to obtain the necessary miracle to cure his pet puppy.

The third young man is a young Irishman, Shamus O'Rearke, who has trouble convincing the adults in the Irish village that the troubles are directly due to the activities of three young Diddiebongs.

What are Diddiebongs? Any Irishman worth his salt knows that they are mischievous leprechauns.

Copies of the CTC catalogue and information about these and the other original children's plays may be obtained from Mrs. Eugene H. Sturgill, 567 Polk Street, Twin Falls, Idaho 83301.



PIPPY Longstocking is a very self-sufficient young lady.



The Gourmet Adventures of DICK BENSEK

A gracious, lovely table is always set in this basic arrangement. Forks are placed on the left side of the plate, knives and spoons on the right, with the knife blade facing the plate. However, the cocktail fork goes to the right of the spoons. Butter knives are laid across the edge of the butter plates, which are placed above and to the left of the dinner plates. Dessert silver comes with dessert, coffee spoons with coffee. Napkins are next to the fork, on the plate when formal.

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HELPFUL HINT: Clean Pyrex dishes by soaking in hot soap suds and ammonia.

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2nd BIG WEEK!
FEATURE TIMES: 12:30 - 2:20 - 6:35 - 7:50 - 10
What makes her garden grow... wouldn't you like to know!
more terrifying than what happened to Baby Jane!
"What Ever Happened to Aunt Alice?"
Gerardine Page Ruth Gordon
Rosemary Forsyth

LIVONIA MAIL
Cinema II
Held Over!!
FEATURE TIMES: 12:40 - 2:50 - 6:10 - 7:25 - 9:35
The Germans fought the little bridge. Sixty-one days later they lost the war.
THE BRIDGE AT REMAGEN
DAVID L. WOLPER
GERHARD SIGAL ROBERT VAUGHN BEN GAZARA HANFORD DILLMAN

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