

# Players display vitality in 'Awake and Sing'

By GAY ZIEGER

## Review

The Jewish Community Center Players have a way of totally absorbing themselves in their productions, never missing a beat.

This synchronization and interplay between actors-become-characters is a delight to watch. They seem to spar and mentally bounce off each other as easily and naturally as one would pull up a chair.

They display varying levels of competence and ability, but no one disappoints or distracts from the total impact. And never does the viewer feel that the stronger ones are carrying the others. Each shows understanding of his part and does his darndest to make it happen.

Clifford Odets' "Awake and Sing" had quite an impact on the audiences of 1935. With this play and "Waiting for Lefty," Odets soon bore the lofty

title of spokesman for the radical movement.

WHILE HIS WORKS mainly concerned first-generation Jewish and Italian families, his message was more far-reaching. "Awake and Sing" pits ineffectual idealism against an even less attractive realistic capitalism. It is a play that makes one re-examine one's values.

In "Awake and Sing" the actors use a play, perhaps written into the script, that Odets would have appreciated. Without fanfare or a formal announcement that the play is about to begin, the players walk on stage, sit down to dinner, and eat. The audience feels it

is watching ordinary people have an ordinary meal. Thus, private conversations among the spectators slowly fades away.

This device is in keeping with the theater of the Thirties' desire to create a union between the actors and the audience. However, the effort to make it the characteristic theater without stars results in confusion. An alphabetical program as opposed to an order-of-appearance listing leads to questions about who's who on first.

Nevertheless, the puzzle begins to fall into place and the characters come to life.

The story centers around a nuclear family of five—husband and wife, son and daughter, and grandfather. Steve Goldsmith, as the idealistic dabbler in Marxism, gives the most convincing performance. He has a fine ear for the sound of the immigrant. His hand and facial gestures were impeccable. His style is so relaxed that one could eas-

ily believe his lines are spontaneous.

AN EQUALLY strong performance is given by Milton Roberts as a slightly shady, yet ultimately appealing, border. Roberts' laugh is a bit strained, but he combines just the right proportions of toughness and gentleness in his interpretation of the role.

For a short while he becomes the character. He also engages Teri Friedman in some of the best on-stage physical struggle one is apt to see.

Ms. Friedman is slightly predictable, but she has spark and really shines when lambasting someone. Her brother, played by John MacCoi, also suffers from learned mannerisms and stances, but he emotes well and captures us with his dynamism and fiery eyes. He plays his character sympathetically and elicits perhaps the most feeling from the audience. There is an aura of vulne-

lity and sensitivity about him.

Helene Roberts, as the overbearing mother, has probably the most demanding role and is equal to it. The strain of portraying an unattractive person, however, sometimes results in a stridency and freneticism that could be toned down.

THE INSIDIOUSNESS of people such as the character she plays is that they can shirk, interfere and manipulate much more subtly. It is disconcerting that Ms. Roberts' accent borders on being Swedish occasionally. Perhaps the old country sound should be hinted at instead.

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## Performers announced for entertainment 'Cole'

Artistic Director Terence Kilburn has set the cast for "Cole," an entertainment based on the music and lyrics of Cole Porter, which will open a five-week run at the Meadow Brook theatre on April 20 at 8:30 p.m. on the campus of Oakland University, Rochester.

The cast of eight singer-dancers includes: Meadow Brook new comers Frank Root, Marianne Chellis, Henry J. Jordan, Connie Coit, Kevin Wilson, Nancy Grabin, Richard Walker

and returning Michele Mullen, who appeared in Meadow Brook's musical productions of "The Drunkard" and "Yankee Ingenuity."

"Cole" will be directed and choreographed by John Sharpe with musical direction by Jim Hohmeyer. Bill Meyer will be the assistant musical director. Set and lights will be by Peter Hicks with costumes by Mary Lynn Bonnell.

Opening week performances of

"Cole" are scheduled at 8:30 p.m. Thursday and Friday, 2 and 8:30 p.m. Saturday and 6:30 p.m. Sunday. The following four weeks will offer performances at 8:30 p.m. Tuesday-Friday, 6 and 9:30 p.m. Saturday, 6:30 p.m. Sunday and 2 p.m. Wednesdays. The theater is dark Mondays. Tickets for all performances may be purchased at Hudson's or by calling the

Meadow Brook Theatre box office at 367-3300.

"Cole" was originally scheduled to close May 14. Since Meadow Brook has been playing to more than 95 per cent of paid capacity throughout the season, artistic director Terence Kilburn decided that the ticket demand for "Cole" could well be satisfied by adding a fifth week to the run of the show.

## Theater group hears speaker

The Birmingham AAUW Children's Theater will hold its April meeting at 1 p.m., April 19 at the home of Mary Beth Cannady, 1883 Fox River Drive, Bloomfield Hills.

Robert J. Warshaw, executive assistant of Orchestra Hall, will speak to the group about the renovation of

the hall. The Children's Theater, now in its 34th year of presenting plays for children, welcomes new members. Any woman in the area interested in joining the organization may attend the meeting by calling Mrs. Cannady at 338-6779 or Donna Rhinehart, chairman, at 644-3091.

## Free Wind plays Hurley's

Rocky Seprino and his group Free Wind are appearing through April 29 at Northfield Hilton's Hurley's.

Members are the group are Nancy Focht, Mark Righettini and Jeff Perry. Hits from George Benson, Rita Coolidge, Doobie Brothers, Hall and Oates and Dave Mason are only a few

of Free Wind's repertoire, which includes a variety of disco, ballads, show tunes and mild rock.

Performances are 8:30 p.m.-1:30 a.m. Monday-Thursday and 9 p.m.-2 a.m. Friday and Saturday. The Northfield Hilton is on Crooks Road at I-75 in Troy.

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