

Premiere Jan. 12

# Children's opera to be launched

By SHIRLEE IDEN

When Michael Szymanski was five years old, his mother took him by the hand and introduced him to the piano. The indoctrination took and music has been his life ever since.

The 31-year-old writer-composer will have his children's opera, "Peddler's Parade," performed in a world premier in Southfield on Jan. 12.

"Peddler's Parade" was originally written under another title in 1974. As "People's Parade" it just didn't work.

"But I liked the idea and the music, too, and I decided to re-work it," Szymanski said.

The resulting "king fable" will be performed by the Southfield Repertory Theatre five times publicly and twice for school audiences. The first public performance will be at 7:30 p.m. on Friday, Jan. 12, at the Parks and Recreation Building in the Civic Center.

A "Red Pop Reception" will follow the performance, affording the audience a chance to meet the actors. According to Ralph Valatka producing director of the theater, the Southfield Arts Council will have a 6:45 p.m. general meeting and then attend the opening.

For the Repertory Theatre, performing an unknown work is a financial risk, but according to Valatka, it is "important to do important things." He admits that public support of such artistic endeavors is vital.

SZYMANSKI, a native Detroit, currently lives between Howell and Pinckney and works as a ranger at Girl Scout Camp.

"The job allows me freer time," he said. "I don't have the usual irritating problems in our fast-paced society. But when the toilets overflow or the electricity shorts out, it can be frustrating."

Those are incidents few and far between. For Szymanski and his wife Diana and daughter Melodee, 8, and son John, 6 1/2, the tranquil country life where they can look out on reindeer or other wild-life is quite pleasurable.

"I worked in mental health before this and I simply decided it was time to address myself to my own mental health," he said. "This kind of a ringer situation was a fantasy, but I saw an ad in the paper and was lucky to get the job."

The Girl Scouts of Metropolitan Detroit testify that Szymanski is responsible for checking Girl Scout troops in and out of camp on a year-round basis, maintaining all camp buildings, equipment and grounds and dealing with contractors and suppliers for repairs and other contingencies.

In addition to his music, Mike and Diana perform together at the Holiday Inn on Howell on weekends, he on piano, she singing.

Last year the Southfield Repertory Theatre premiered Szymanski's "Sweet Milk of Madness," a hit with audiences.

"Peddler" is about a tyrannical king who wants to co-exist but who has been corrupted and changed by power. There are five people in the cast who represent the community he rules.

"THEY'RE FED UP with the king because he outlaws things like laughter and song," Szymanski explained. "They hold a clandestine town meeting to take a stand against their ruler and, as they meet, a peddler appears."

The peddler is the corollary to the king, and the plot reveals that, although he has no power or material possessions, he is freer than the mighty ruler.

The king, the queen, the peddler and the community people all interact in a fascinating plot. Adding to the interest is "Captain Classy," described as an elastic man stretching from the peddler's toes to the king's crown.

What happens is something to be enjoyed only while watching the opera, which will be a fifth anniversary show for the Repertory Theatre.

It was Valatka who suggested to Szymanski last year that he drop the dialogue from "Peddler's Parade" and make it an opera.



MICHAEL SZYMANSKI

"It is very well structured dramatically with a nice balance of action and character," he said. "The king will be played by Andy Hurley, and Captain Classy is Hal Doyle, a Southfield resident."

Valatka said Henriette Weinberg, who runs a shop at the American Center in Southfield and lives in West Bloomfield, will play the queen. "She has a great show biz background and toured with the USO and the State Department and played the Hilberry Theatre, too," he said.

SZYMANSKI has found the opera medium much to his liking. "I've written a lot of tunes, but I like this form ever better than musicals," he said.

"I find I have more freedom this way. I like to rhyme and play with words. The fitting together of words and music is like a puzzle."

How the completed puzzle works will only become evident when "Peddler's Parade" is performed. For those who like special challenges, seeing a world premiere can be a pleasant one.



## The Odd Couple

Kent Martin and Edgar A. Guest III team up as Felix Unger and Oscar Madison in Nancy Gurwin Productions' "The Odd Couple," which opens in Botsford Inn Dinner Theatre Wednesday, Jan. 17. Dinner is served at 7 p.m. on

Wednesdays, followed by showtime at 8:30 p.m. On Sundays, dinner is at 6 p.m. with a 7:30 p.m. curtain. Reservations are being taken now by calling Botsford Inn, 477-4800.



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## Book pictures lively area

In a recently published soft-cover book, "Detroit Plus," the Birmingham-Bloomfield area is definitely one of the pluses.

A large book with splendid color photos of the area and a few from regions beyond, it is an ideal gift for someone about to move into the area.

Creating an awareness of Detroit's renaissance beyond the state's borders is a challenge to be attended to and this is a colorful start.

In the back there is a 24-page guide to basic information sources such as community organizations and chambers of commerce for all of the suburbs as well as the city. In addition to the basics, the book lists shopping malls, museums, Michigan colleges, public recreation facilities and lots of miscellany. In this latter group are all the answers to questions seldom answered before moving to a new area—property taxes, state income tax, beverage laws, buses, trains, airports and taxis. If the actual facts aren't there, "Detroit Plus" tells you where to find them.

The book isn't a complete listing of restaurants, stores and places to go. It is more of a supplement to these kinds of listings. It gives the flavor and a sampling of the kind of lifestyle a family of moderate or better means could expect to find here.

Copies should be in stock at B. Dalton, Hudson's, Doubleday, Marwell and Waldenbooks. It is published by Ceko Publishing Co., 30400 Van Dyke, Warren 48093. The phone number is 575-9400.

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