



The St. Dunstan's Guild of Cranbrook cast for "Carousel" rehearses at the outdoor Greek Theater in Bloomfield Hills. Many families have parents and children in the show. (Photos by Randy Borst)

Just because it's June!



Larry Finn stars as Billy and Nina Studebaker as Julie.

"June Is Bustin' Out All Over." That's the title of one of the Broadway musical hit "Carousel," which St. Dunstan's Guild of Cranbrook will present in June.

The annual outdoor show will be performed at the Cranbrook Greek Theater, Bloomfield Hills, Friday through Sunday, June 1-3, and Thursday through Saturday, June 7-9. Curtain time is 9 p.m. For ticket information call 644-0527.

At Sunday's rehearsal, the entire day was spent putting together the prologue, which has no dialogue but does have 749 measures of music. It's a big carnival scene, where the action of the show takes place.

Dwight Rinke is directing the production starring Larry Finn as Billy Bigelow, the carnival barker who runs a carousel, and Nina Studebaker as Julie Jordan, who meets and falls in love with Billy when she comes to the carnival.

In "Carousel," Billy and Julie do a duet on the ballad "If I Love You," and Billy sings the powerful, tender, seven-minute-long "Soliloquy."

At St. Dunstan's playhouse the construction crew is building a carousel for the show. The painted horses will be flat, rather than three-dimensional, and "the girls will pretend to ride but they'll be pushing," said Bud Matych, who plays Mr. Snow in the production.



Dwight Rinke is directing the show.

Audience flips for 'Dracula'

By HELEN ZUCKER

Review

The Birmingham Village Players' production of Ted Tiller's "Count Dracula," based on Bram Stoker's classic, is an evening of enjoyable theater.

The entire cast (and much of the audience) seemed bitten by moon madness and spring fever on Friday's opening night.

Tiller's adaptation of the famous 19th century novel (there are many) falls into the mystery/horror/comedy genre. This is one of the most difficult kinds of theater to pull off.

Sheila Girardot's witty direction sets this astonishing play — that deals with life, death and the undead — on the right course. The special effects by Barbara Underwood, Lindsay Balmer, Debi Diehl, Don Johnson, Brian Coughlin, Kim Cooke and John Lorne are absolutely dazzling, and the rest of the cast and crew hold up their end admirably.

HARRIET FOX is wonderfully dotty as Sybil Seward, the sherry-stealing sister of Dr. Arthur Seward. One wonders why Sybil isn't an inhabitant of the asylum her brother is in charge of.

Ms. Fox is a gifted screamer (I thought the police had arrived during one of Ms. Fox's glass-shattering shrieks).

Ms. Fox is eternally cheerful, eternally absent-minded, and she has most of the good lines. When she tells us that she has invited Count Dracula to dinner because he kisses her hand, and the "tingling is pleasant," while the men stand gloomily around sensing disaster, Ms. Fox gives us a Sybil who is the very essence of good natured insensitivity.

She sews while mayhem breaks out around her, reads Dickens while the men frantically rush about with crucifixes, drops jelly on the organ. She is blithely responsible for Dracula's presence in Dr. Seward's house, since a vampire must be invited into a home by someone living in it before it can wreak its will.

Needless to say, Sybil survives intact. Even Dracula won't have her! Ms. Fox is one of the show's greatest assets.

BORIS SELLERS is strong as the sinister Count Dracula. He moves with the majestic sweep of a man who happens to be centuries old, cuts from terrifying looks to comic lines effectively. When he tells the doctor's pretty ward, "My dear, you are a feast," the full meaning of his innocuous sentence is quite clear.

Sellers is particularly good in the special effects department. When he appears out of nowhere behind the couch, when the lights go out and his face looms over the mantelpiece, displacing a portrait, when he hypnotizes Sybil, when he murders his slave, the mad Renfield, Sellers keeps up the creepy/comic pace even when he is in his crypt.

Bill Haycock nearly steals the show as Renfield (my favorite character). Haycock has the best grasp on this wonderful material. He understands the desperate Renfield to the bottom of his torn soul; he leaps about with the lightness of one of the winged creatures Renfield is given to eating.

"Little drops of blood give me

power" the lonely Renfield cries. An expert escapee, he is the bane of his keepers at the Seward asylum.

"How did you get here?" the dazed Dr. Seward asks Renfield as he flies in from the balcony.

"I CAME ON the wings of Pegasus. How else would you enter a room?" Renfield answers. In fact, he is well acquainted with the roof, the stairwells, the elevator, the entire house and all its wards.

Haycock moves convincingly from his madness as a disciple of Dracula, crying, "The blood is the life!" whenever his keepers drag him off, through a moment of lucidity when he pities pretty Mina, who has always been kind to him, to his final despair at Dracula's disloyalty. Haycock is so good that we are sorry for Renfield when Dracula murders him.

Tim Wittingler is a ball of energy as Heinrich VanHelsing, the Dutch doctor who proves to be Dracula's undoing. Whenever Wittingler is onstage, the air is charged with urgency.

The gentle doctor has enough faith in his beliefs to convert all the skeptics in the house (with the exception of Sybil, who is incapable of the thought needed for conversion to anything).

Wittingler delivers his lines with passion, and he makes us feel he has the knowledge, the goodness and the patience to stand up against the forces of darkness. He is Dracula's nemesis in this life and death struggle, and Wittingler's final conversation with the arrogant, sneering Count is a high point.

GENE EWALD gets off to a slow start as the dense Dr. Seward, who sees no connection between Renfield and Dracula, but he picks up as the evening moves on. Ewald is a natty looking doctor, and he is good in the final hide-and-seek, chase scenes.

John Reddy is believable as the weary, dutiful wardman and housekeeper, Hennessey. Charles Cassar gets in a few funny quavers as the ward assistant, Wesley. Chuck Peace is an incredibly well turned-out, handsome young fiancée. When the action starts, Peace picks up speed as Jonathan Harker, the rather priggish boyfriend from London. There is a great fight scene between Peace and Haycock that is worth the price of admission all by itself. The prig turns into an athlete and the madman, Renfield, proves to be more than his match. It doesn't look choreographed.

Joyce Clouthier is suitably beautiful as the sought-after bride of both Harker and Dracula. Ms. Clouthier needs a bit of work with her lines, and a higher sense of the drama of the situation on her part would have helped.

SET DESIGN BY Dick Wagner was excellent. The painting over the mantelpiece by George Bliss was effective. Lights by Sandra Perkins and crew, sound by Bob Overmyer, and make-up by Hunt Daugherty and crew were all excellent.

"Count Dracula" runs Thursday-Saturday, May 17-19. The playhouse is located at Chestnut and Hunter.

Getting Around

By ETHEL SIMMONS



Singer-actress does poetic songs

From Jacques Brel to Kurt Weill. That's the route actress-singer Henrietta Valor has taken in her stage career.

Through Sunday, May 27, she is starring in "Berlin to Broadway with Kurt Weill" at Meadow Brook Theater in Rochester. There are four other stars in the show, but Ms. Valor is clearly a stand-out.

Possessed of an exceptionally fine voice, along with the ability to project emotion, she exemplifies a word she used frequently in an interview last week: Vulnerable.

On stage, she reveals a strength, as she performs in the musical numbers that make up the show and present Weill's talents as a composer through his years writing music for hit productions and songs in Berlin, Paris and New York.

Brel and Kurt Weill, comparing their styles.

She starred as the First Girl in "Jacques Brel Is Alive and Well and Living in Paris" off-Broadway, then alternated on Broadway in the role created by Elly Stone whose husband Eric Blau brought the show to New York.

Blau called She also appeared in another run of the show later in New York, and "Eric Blau called me here wanting me to open at Storyville in the role." Ms. Valor said. She declined because of her show at Meadow Brook.

"There's a great deal of passion in his songs," she said of Brel's work. Recalling her performances in "Jacques Brel," Ms. Valor declared, "It was such an impact on me."

ABLE TO PULL OUT all the stops emotionally, she has a similar energy-charged role doing Kurt Weill's fine music that is complemented by outstanding lyrics (especially with Bertolt Brecht).

"Moments of recognition. That's what makes Brel's music so timely,"

she continued, in her appraisal. Then, talking about the Meadow Brook show which opened April 26, Ms. Valor said, "I don't read reviews right away. You're so vulnerable."

"Berlin to Broadway" devotes the first act to Weill's music from shows produced in Germany, including "The Threepenny Opera," "Happy End" and "The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahogany," all done with Brecht, plus "Marie Galante," from a show in Paris when the composer fled Germany.

The first act has a grim quality because of the time it was set in — prewar Berlin — and Brecht's lyrics touched with irony. Act two, when Weill came to Broadway, moves along at a sprightly pace.

Of the Weill-Brecht combination and the show's first act, she pondered, "Maybe the German translator was not able to make it as flowing for an American audience."

Weill and Brecht "are able to open to the raw bone," she said. The first act tells about how to survive and Brecht says "you eat your brother," his lyrics putting the twist in.

SHE SAID the music hits against the fur, and that she finds the first act very exciting.

"The genius of Kurt Weill," she explained, "is that he was able to go from one country to another and absorb. 'Marie Galante' is so French." A song from that show became a theme for the French Underground during World War II.

In the U.S., Weill wrote folk opera. One sequence in act two includes songs from "Street Scene," with lyrics by Langston Hughes. "Ain't It Awful, the Heat?" is sung by the quartet of stars including Jenny Brown, Richard Marshall and Andy McAvin, along with Ms. Valor.

"We're fanning ourselves" (the two women) out on the sidewalk. The music sounds so much like Duke Ellington, Ms. Valor said, marveling that Weill was able to capture the people's mood.

"My feeling is he came to the U.S. and he loved it," she said. "Kurt Weill was a really developing, getting into style."



Henrietta Valor is one of the stars of "Berlin to Broadway with Kurt Weill." (Staff photo by Stephen Cantrell)