



Playing Shakespeare

In a light moment from "The Comedy of Errors" are Cynthia Cole of Bloomfield Hills and Dan Derkacz of Pontiac, who portrays Dromio of Syracuse, one of the twin servants. The Oakland University production is staged in the style of commedia dell'arte with masked characters, clowns and acrobatics. Performances of the Shakespeare comedy continue at 8:30 p.m. Friday-Saturday and 2:30 and 8:30 p.m. Sunday at the Barn Theatre on campus near Rochester. For ticket information call 377-2000.



Ethel Simmons

Monsieur Joseph: True maitre d'

Monsieur Joseph is back at the Benchmark restaurant in Southfield's Michigan Inn.

The man who is a true maitre d' has returned to his first love, spending time with people in the restaurant, as well as supervising behind the scenes.

Joseph first came to the United States in 1975 from the French Riviera, where he started out as head captain and eventually ran his own restaurant in Monte Carlo.

He was the maitre d' at the Benchmark from 1975-77 and built up his own following of customers. They came to the hotel's prestigious restaurant not only to taste the excellent cuisine but also to enjoy the special attentions of Joseph.

"I LOVE THE dining room. I love the people," Joseph said with enthusiasm during a recent morning interview before the hotel opened for luncheon business.

"A maitre d' is just like a football coach," Joseph explained. If he's not happy in one place, he just moves on, he said.

This accounts for the fact that since leaving the Benchmark in '77, he opened up Jacques continental restaurant in Bingham Farms, then Duglass Duglass Restaurant Duglass in Southfield, worked at the Golden Mushroom in Southfield and also at the Sheraton-Southfield.

"I greet them with the French," he continued, detailing some of a maitre d's special charm. "I escort them to a table, have a little talk with them. If they want something special served at the table, I personally prepare it."

The tableside dishes can't be on the regular Benchmark dinner menu (a new menu is coming shortly), Joseph said, because he wouldn't have time to serve numerous diners. But when time permits, he can do scampi French Riviera style. Joseph is also known for his Caesar Salad, prepared tableside, from his own special recipe.

"JACQUES WAS a big challenge to me. It still is one of the most beautiful dining rooms there is," he said, recalling some one of his stops (eight months there) before returning to the Benchmark.

"All high society of the city — Gov. Romney, G. Mennen Williams — came there. I built up the name and Jacques." Working at Restaurant Duglass, "a lot of people followed me over there." He added: "I respect Duglass. He's got quite a following, too."

Of the Golden Mushroom, he said: "It's a good restaurant. Chef Milo is super. But it's not my style of dining room. I'm more for formal."

"I didn't fit the dining room. People were coming with blue jeans. Here I was with a tuxedo."

At the Sheraton, they're trying to build up the Loophole "as classy dining. It has the potential, but they (the management) didn't come with the money."

When Joseph was invited back to the Benchmark recently, he returned "with the intention to bring the Benchmark back to the top."

According to Joseph, he came to the restaurant a year after it opened. "That's where I made my name. It was a super restaurant. It has a little problem now."

As he surveyed the rust and brown decor, with stained glass and shiny brass accents, he said: "This dining room is a beauty." Joseph noted, however, that the room will be redecorated, the wooden chandeliers replaced with more formal ones, and a stained glass panel removed to allow space for a cocktail bar.

In 1978, the Benchmark received a seal for best menu from the National Restaurant Association. "It's still a nice menu," he said, but the offerings of the last three years will be changed to "go a little on the Cuisine Nouvelle (new cuisine)."

The Benchmark is open for lunch and dinner, with free valet parking now

available. The diner's ticket is stamped by the Benchmark. There's still a free rose to each woman guest, and when reservations are made far enough in advance, matches at the table bear the name of the person who requested the table.

"When a client spends like \$30 for his dinner, he has to receive A-1 service," Joseph said.

"Most of the people working under me are very, very happy. I give them very good training."



Preparing for the Benchmark to open at dinner, Monsieur Joseph demonstrates wine service. Joseph is manager and maitre d' at the restaurant in the Michigan Inn. (Staff photo by Mindy Saunders)

Musicale chorus starts rehearsals

The Birmingham Musicale Chorus started rehearsals at 9:30 Thursday mornings at The Community House, Townsend at Bates, Birmingham.

New voices are welcome, and director Hazel Lawrence will audition for the group by appointment, 674-1779.

The chorus, an adjunct of the Birmingham Musicale of the Michigan and National Federation of Music Clubs, presents a Christmas program yearly. This year's will be held Dec. 11 at

Northbrook Presbyterian Church. A spring concert is planned for next April, and the chorus also gives other local performances.

Rehearsals are held on 10 Thursday mornings, 9:30-11 a.m. in both spring and fall.

Co-chairwomen for the chorus this year are Zeina Randall and Jan Horne. Accompanist for the chorus is Janet Lee, pianist and organist from this area.

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Performances will continue at 8:30 p.m. Fridays-Saturdays through Oct.

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"The Miracle Worker," by William Gibson, will open at 8:30 p.m. Friday at the Will-O-Way Repertory Theatre, 775 W. Long Lake Road, Bloomfield Township. Performances will continue at 8:30 p.m. Fridays-Saturdays through Oct.

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