

Thursday, October 23, 1980

## Encore Cinema faces 'make or break' year

By R.S. LEIDER

Geri Lester and Diane Klein recently sat at a conference table in a still-grand suite at Cranbrook House in Bloomfield Hills, excitedly talking about the Encore Cinema Club's current season.

Now in its fifth season, Encore Cinema for the last few years has been part of the offerings of Cranbrook P.M.

Yet, the women say with definite authority, the club is a separate entity within the organization. The Michigan Council for the Arts is also supportive of this unusual yet successful endeavor.

Ms. Lester stresses that the club has remained true to its objectives since its inception. She called this season "the make it or break it" one. From the response of the public to the first offering, the future of Encore looks positive.

The season's opening film, Ken Russell's "Women in Love" was a total sell-out. "We had to turn people away," said Ms. Klein.

THE NEXT FILM will be "Aguirre the Wrath of God," a 1973 Werner Herzog masterpiece of the New German Cinema. It will be shown at 8 p.m. Monday and Tuesday.

These evenings will be structured like all the rest. The Cranbrook Institute of Science Museum, where the meetings are held, opens its doors at 7:30 p.m. At that time a delicious dessert and coffee is served.

The evening is very informal. It's not like a class, yet the comprehensive program notes are as fine as any title could offer. You don't have to sit and listen to the speaker, but seldom is the time anyone does not.

Before the film is a time to relax and say a few hellos. After is a time to share the excitement of hearing someone else's impressions. The vibes from the speaker and members of the audience provide an atmosphere unlike any other evening at the movies you've ever experienced.

ENCORE is very different from the Detroit Institute of Arts Film Theatre Series. First of all it is smaller. It offers eight carefully chosen films as opposed to the DIA's extensive season. Then there's the coffee, the dessert, the discussion. "In fact, says Ms. Lester, "The DIA is very supportive of us."

On occasion the evening will include shorts. These can range from something exciting that has come across the club's desk to original films made by local film artists. "This always adds to a surprise to the evening," said Ms. Lester. "We are a vehicle to expose some local talent, students and pros."

Putting a season together can be fun and, well, a bit of a gamble. Ms. Lester said the club needs to look at what represents quality film versus that which is currently popular. "We will not sell

ourselves to stay alive," she said firmly.

In selecting the features, aspects such as color, black and white, foreign, sound, subtitles and variety are all taken into consideration. "We don't choose simply by box office appeal," Ms. Klein said, "but we also look at the overall interest a film will have."

"WITH OUR FIFTH season we've learned what people will turn out for. In November we are showing 'The Big Sleep' and, in balance, Fellini's 'Amarcord' in April." Ms. Lester enthusiastically continued, "We program beyond the superficial film fan, though no one is discouraged from any part of the evening. Most of our members are interested in film as an art to some degree."

The speakers include Joseph A. Gomez, associate professor of Wayne State University. Professor Gomez spoke on the Russell film. The selection couldn't have been better. Gomez has authored a book on Russell's works. He will comment on the superb Russian

film "Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors" 1964 in March.

Eliot Wilhelm, director of the DIA Film Theatre, will provide comment and answers to question on this month's film. He also will be the speaker for "The Searchers" (1956) directed by John Ford and starring John Wayne, in February.

The individual admission cost is modest for the range and length of the evening provided. For \$5 per person, or \$2.50 for senior citizens and students, tickets may be purchased for one of the most special evenings the area has to offer. A season's book of tickets, eight tickets good for any of the films, is still available for \$30.

Remember to arrive early, reservations are not taken and you want to be assured of a seat.

The club can be reached by writing to: Encore Cinema, 380 Lane Pine Road, P.O. Box 801, Bloomfield Hills 48013, or by calling Cranbrook P.M. at 645-3535 during regular office hours.



### A touch of comedy

Felicia (Dawn Daniels, left), a visiting actress friend of their oldest son Steve, figures in the household comedy surrounding Jeff Cooper (Weston Meyer) and his wife Katy (Maggie Bennett). "Finishing Touches" by Jean Kerr opens at 9 p.m. Friday at

St. Dunstan's Guild of Cranbrook in Bloomfield Hills. Performances continue at 9 p.m. Saturday and Oct. 31, Nov. 1. For ticket information call the 24-hour reservation service at 644-0527. (Staff photo by Stephen Cantrell)

## Musical tells about growing up

By CHRISTINE PIETRZYK

It's a show about learning. It's a show about the sometimes hilarious, sometimes painful journey we must all make from childhood to becoming an adult.

It's a show that sings and dances its way through everyday memories. It's a show about me and you.

In a rare joint venture, the Southfield Civic Theatre and Crossroads Productions Ltd., are presenting an original musical, "Underneath My One Most Favorite Tree," with lyrics, script, written and directed by Dearborn resident Douglas Berry.

Performances will be presented at 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday and Oct. 30-31 and Nov. 1 at 2 p.m. at Southfield Parks and Recreation, 26000 Evergreen.

THE SHOW is a series of scenarios, some humorous and some poignant, that depict the adventures and misadventures of growing up in America. An energetic cast of six young people sing and dance their way through everything from pizza parlors to pajama parties. And audience members are sure to recognize themselves in these characters.

"It shows things people have really experienced," said Berry. "From learning about the opposite sex to learning about yourself. That's why I hope everyone will come to see it."

And he conveys the man's humanity so well that one is able to forgive him his agreeing with the idea that just as one bowl of rice is like another bowl of rice, so it is with women. And to a lesser extent his observation that:

"A woman must be a blossom with honey for just one man."

"A man should be like a honey bee and gather all he can."

Indeed.

His lovely counterpart, Sue La Duke Wiley, also has a regal bearing. She commands the stage. Her every movement, every word has direction and bearing. She plays the role affectionately, with humor and confidence. And her voice is a delight.

OTHER OUTSTANDING musical moments are provided by John Brunling and Linda Nickolson, as the ill-fated lovers. Brunling's voice shows strength and passion. Ms. Nickolson, both vocally and visually, has an aura of youthful innocence and purity.

Bernie Stein and Bill Doehring, in two relatively minor roles, show both a sense of the dramatic and the poignant in their avowed love and respect for the king. Doehring's outrage at what he believes is the governess' hand in the destruction of his master provides an electric moment. Ms. Stein's closing words of tribute, sung beside the royal

At age 25, Berry already has a host of impressive credits to his name. He began his theater career at the age of 11 as an actor. For the last 14 years he has been involved in a number of school and community theater projects.

Berry is a member of the Screen Actors Guild and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists. He also holds a B.A. in mass communications from Wayne State University and is now employed as a writer and producer of commercial and industrial films.

In addition, since the age of 14, Berry has been a lyricist and has written some 200 songs, including all the music in "Underneath My One Most Favorite Tree."

IN FACT, the original concept for this production came from his own experiences and began the day he started to write song lyrics about them.

"The songs are about a person just like me, growing up in America," Berry said. "Songs about pajama parties, going to college, a first car, a first date. But they were all things that happened to me, or things that I knew or wrote about."

It's that basis of common experience that is sure to draw audiences to the show. The production not only showcases Berry's outstanding work but it combines the professional talent and

technical expertise of two local theater companies.

This unusual collaboration comes from Crossroads Productions Ltd., a Southfield-based professional theater company, and the Southfield Civic Theatre.

Crossroads Productions Ltd., a professional touring company that specializes in children's and educational theater, is providing an all-professional cast of actors for "Underneath My One Most Favorite Tree."

THE SOUTHFIELD Civic Theatre, which presents a variety of adult shows, is contributing technical expertise and direction to the production. The over-all direction of the play has fallen on Berry's shoulders. In the six-

day 1979 premiere of the show, with the Dearborn Summer Repertory Theatre, Berry played a lead role, as well as director.

And it was during the show's first run in Dearborn that Crossroads Productions Ltd., president and managing director Donald V. Calamia decided he wanted to produce the show.

"People who know me could tell you that I don't believe in standing ovations," Calamia said. "But when I saw that show I was one of the first in the audience on my feet to applaud."

Calamia then approached Berry to discuss the possibility of a production. "It's an excellent dinner theater format," Calamia said. "And in our dealings with Doug, we decided only to do the show if we could really do it right."



DOUGLAS BERRY

## Avon's 'The King and I' has a style of its own

By GAY ZIEGER

### review

The story of Anna and her Siamese king first entered the public consciousness in 1946 when Anna Leonowens's autobiography, telling of her tutelage of royal children in an eastern court, was made into a film starring Rex Harrison and Linda Darnell.

Ten years later, Rogers and Hammerstein created a musical, cast Yul Brynner and Deborah Kerr — and the rest is history. So you would think there would be no surprises in the Avon Players production of "The King and I." But there are.

First of all, I had to keep reminding myself that this is community theater and, as such, needs to work within the confines of limited budgeting, has to draw crews and actors from within the ranks or the area.

The program notes indicate that finding local talent presents no problem. The cast is composed of people who have attended acting schools, have college degrees in theater and voice and have acting, directing, professional singing and television experience. Their performances do not belie their credits.

WHILE YUL BRYNNER is, beyond question, the quintessential King, Jerry Sima brings his own brand of elegance to the role. Many of his mannerisms are Brynneresque, but the fact that he is able to master them and make them seem quite natural is in itself a feat.

His slightly arrogant, yet highly sensual, stance, his nobly held head, his jutting jaw all capture the grandeur of this ruler.

And he conveys the man's humanity so well that one is able to forgive him his agreeing with the idea that just as one bowl of rice is like another bowl of rice, so it is with women. And to a lesser extent his observation that:

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Bernie Stein and Bill Doehring, in two relatively minor roles, show both a sense of the dramatic and the poignant in their avowed love and respect for the king. Doehring's outrage at what he believes is the governess' hand in the destruction of his master provides an electric moment. Ms. Stein's closing words of tribute, sung beside the royal

deathbed, brings tears.

Supporting this fine cast is about the cutest bunch of kids ever assembled on one stage. They sing and dance their little hearts out, from the eldest and tallest to the youngest and smallest, a 3-year-old who obviously studied and rehearsed like a trouper. On occasion, he adds a bit of merriment to rather somber scenes, but we all know about the upstaging of children and animals.

The Avon Players are not satisfied with the bare essentials of just a play and its players, maybe some period costumes and a prop or two. They put on a display of magnitude and ambition almost bordering on the excessive.

The costumes are elegant, elaborate and colorful. And the changes seem unending. The scenery is appropriately rich and court-like. The creation, at the end, of a large, luminous Buddha, is a masterful touch.

AS IF THIS is not enough, there is a carnival procession of a grandeur not often associated with this kind of theater. The audience shows astonishment at a parade of papier-mache elephant, dragon, and clown-head bearers; acrobats, tumblers, and flag holders winds its way through the aisles.

Under the consistently expert direction of Marge Monroes, the Avon Players put on a high-quality drama and a spectacle meriting a year's run rather than three long weekends.

Unfortunately, this production, continuing through Saturday is sold out. For information on the rest of the season contact Avon Players in Avon Township.

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