

Thursday, November 27, 1980

Sheraton-Southfield offers lounge theater

By DONALD V. CALAMIA

A touch of Las Vegas will be coming to the Detroit area when the Sheraton-Southfield Hotel and Showstopper Productions join forces to present adult theatrical entertainment called lounge theater.

Jane Baumann, sales manager of the hotel, said the premise of lounge theater is to give local theater-goers, especially dinner theater patrons, an alternative to the usual dinner theater fare for a limited amount of money.

"What we're doing here in Las Vegas without either the elaborate water fountains or razzle-dazzle light displays," Ms. Baumann said. "Besides gambling, the main attraction there is the entertainment. People avoid the crowded dinner shows to attend the midnight performances. There they can relax and be entertained."

"We may be smaller in scale than they are, but the concept's the same. I think that this is going to be dynamic, too!"

OPENING PRODUCTION at the Sheraton-Southfield will be "The Robber Bridegroom," a Mississippi folk tale about young romance which is filled with energetic country and bluegrass-type music.

Performances will begin at 8 p.m. Sunday and run for the next four weeks on Sunday and Monday evenings in the lounge.

Instead of coming in to eat dinner and watch a show, patrons of the lounge theater will be invited to the theater, buy a few drinks and relax while watching the show.

"I think that the idea of not including

dinner here is what makes this project so attractive," Ms. Baumann said. "Many people just don't have the kind of money it takes to attend a dinner theater. A couple can easily spend over \$50 at a dinner theater. Here, they'll spend only about \$20."

"The bar will open a few hours before showtime so that our patrons can come in and have a few drinks before the show," Ms. Baumann said, "but after 8 p.m., only the show patrons will be allowed in Yesterday's Bar patrons will be asked to move into our other bar across the hall."

Seating in the lounge will be similar to theater-in-the-round, with the action taking place on both the bandstand and the dance floor. Patrons also will be able to stand at the bar rail to watch the show.

IN CHOOSING the right show to open the lounge theater, producers Larry Cohen and Hank Krajewski of Showstopper, a local theater company, opted to go with pure entertainment. Krajewski, a professional nightclub musician, and Cohen want only shows that can cross the fine line between theater and lounge entertainment.

Cohen said, "We're looking for shows that have comedy, drama, humor, singing, and dancing, quality shows that are uplifting. That's why we chose 'The Robber Bridegroom' as our opening production."

Cohen, who appeared in an earlier production of "The Robber Bridegroom," said, "It's a really appealing show to adults. I got many of the original cast members back together under the excellent direction of Michael Burden and invited the hotel management

to see it. They saw the same potential in the show that we did."

Ms. Baumann said she didn't see how the hotel could do the show in a dinner theater format. It was the hotel's Food and Beverage Director, Marshall Brown, who came up with the idea of lounge theater.

Ms. Baumann said, "We felt that we would only get involved with something like this if we would do it right, and we are doing this right."

COHEN ADDED, "The changes Michael Burden has made in the show for this run are just terrific. It's a totally different show than before. What's he's done to the dance numbers is just superb."

The show, both groups agree, will appeal to Yesterday's usual clientele. Ms. Baumann said, "Our patrons here are mainly 25 years old and up. 'The Robber Bridegroom' is good, highly entertaining theater for this age group. We're expecting big crowds at our performances, especially once word-of-mouth starts getting around."

"In fact, the hotel's 280 employees are already excited about the show. The lounge employees have even asked if they can wear country-style costumes on the nights of the performances."

In addition to the show, the price of admission includes dancing to the music of a country-western band, beginning a half hour after the close of the show.

"For only \$5," Cohen said, "our patrons will be getting a relatively inexpensive evening filled with a variety of top-quality entertainment."



Courtney Burr portrays John Merrick, the lead role in "The Elephant Man." Joan Grant is his benefactress, Mrs. Madge Kendal, a famous actress of the Victorian era.

Drama opening Dec. 26

"The Elephant Man," a Broadway hit based on an actual historical figure from Victorian England, will open Dec. 26 at the Birmingham Theatre and run through Jan. 4.

Curtain times are at 8 p.m. Sundays-Wednesdays and Fridays-Saturdays; matinees are at 2 p.m. Saturdays-Sundays. For this production only there is no Thursday performance. Further ticket information is available from the Birmingham Theatre box office at 644-3533.

The Bernard Pomerance play opened in 1979 on Broadway and swept all the major theatrical awards including the 1979 Tony Award as Best Play, the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award and the Drama Desk Award.

The play is based on the case history of John Merrick, a man whose luminous soul was trapped within a body people regarded as monstrous. Rescued from a demeaning sideshow by Frederick Treves, a highly respected London surgeon, Merrick ironically is transformed from freak to the toast of society.

Ewer plays lead role as invalid

The cast for Meadow Brook Theatre's third production of the season, "The Imaginary Invalid," has been announced by Artistic Director Terence Kilburn.

The most famous of Moliere's comedies will open a four-week run at 8:30 p.m. Dec. 4 on the campus of Oakland University near Rochester.

Meadow Brook veteran Donald Ewer will play the title role of Monsieur Argan who lets quacks punish his body and his pocketbook. Lynn Mansbach will have the role of Angelique, the hypochondriac's charming daughter,

whom he wants to marry off to a silly medical student, so that he can always have a doctor in the house.

Bob Murdy will portray the medical student, and David Kroil will play Cleante, the suitor Angelique prefers.

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