

Monday, May 18, 1983 O&E

(F)39

# McDonald-Eddy sing-alikes

## Dishing up a bit of nostalgia

By Shirlee Rose Iden  
staff writer

Someone once asked Nelson Eddy, film star and singer, why he never married his co-star, Jeanette MacDonald.

"But I did, eight times," he replied. Nostalgic trivia of this sort is a direct turn-on for fans of those stars of days gone by, and the musical thrills they endowed.

Piccolo Regional Opera Society of Southfield founders Marjorie Gordon and Jonathan Swift will take fans back to those days when the company presents a concert of music of Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald.

"Evening of Nostalgia" marks 50 years of the songs of the great film artists. It will open at 8 p.m. Saturday, May 21, at Mercy High School Auditorium, Farmington Hills.

"Nostalgia" is expected to begin a series of programs by the company, sponsored by the Southfield Cultural Arts Department, to encourage community involvement in opera, to help area performers develop talent and to support public opera productions.

In addition, the society will introduce opera to children through its "Opera in the Schools" program.

PICCOLO OPERA came into existence in 1961, formed by Gordon, who arrived in Detroit with her husband, Nathan, a first violinist, 25 years ago. Gordon's collaboration with Swift began when she came here.

A New York native, she sang with the New York City Opera, has done tours abroad, radio, records and television.

Swift was born in Scotland, though his parents lived in this country, returned there and then came back to Detroit. He refers to himself as "a New York reproduction."



Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald were romantic singing idols of another day. Members of Piccolo Opera Company come to Farmington Hills to perform the songs from films they made and operettas in which they performed.

He grew up in Detroit gaining his musical education here and at the Paris conservatory. A teacher, he decided to do his music full time in the 1930s and with work in radio, television and recordings, he went to Lebanon, Egypt, and many places around the world.

A resident of Birmingham, Swift teaches at the School of Global Education in Livonia, considered one of 16 model programs in the country. "It's an alternative school of international studies for ninth to 12th grade," he said. The school will have 170 students in September, he added.

"Those of us who formed the Piccolo Opera were professional artists based here who travel the U.S. and Canada," Gordon said.

"It's a unique repertory company. We've helped singers debut as well as

composers. We've brought English opera to places it's never been. We do tours of schools as well."

FOR SWIFT and Gordon, the "Nostalgia" evening is special. First, because it celebrates the 50 year tradition of Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald whose movies and recordings once topped the popularity list for millions of people.

Secondly, because both of them knew the old-time movie stars. Gordon worked with Nelson Eddy in New York and remembers his helping her with concert technique.

"He died in 1957 in Miami, just dropped dead," Swift said. "Just a week or two before, someone had asked him if he would retire and he said 'I'll sing until I drop.'"

Swift said he was raised on Jeanette MacDonald-Nelson Eddy and once corresponded with MacDonald and her husband, Gene Raymond.

"I was invited to their home and my mother was with me, too. She was thrilled to death," he said.

Gordon said listening to MacDonald sing in a concert inspired her to sing. Later, singing with Eddy, she said "He was a lovely guy, every female on the set, young and old, would cluster around him."

Swift described him as "having a special talent for putting people at ease — he was like the guy next door."

GORDON and SWIFT will give a sample of just about all the films and operettas for which MacDonald and Eddy are known.

Accompanying the duo will be pianist William Jones.

In 1961, the Piccolo Opera Company was the first company to perform with the Detroit Symphony. Gordon said they've innovated many programs and this one will start off a new metro area focus.

"People who know our work would like us to concentrate more on this area than on touring," she said. "We'd like to encourage local singers and composers and give them the opportunity to work with experienced professionals and to get a chance to perform."

Swift and Gordon believe there's enough talent in this area to put on opera without reaching out to New York and elsewhere to fill the casts. Tickets for "Evening of Nostalgia" are \$5. for general admission, \$10 reserved, and \$25 inner circle which includes a reception with the artists.

They can be obtained by mailing a check to "Piccolo Opera Company — An Evening of Nostalgia," City of Southfield, Cultural Arts Division, 26000 Evergreen, Southfield 48037. For more information, call 354-4717.



Jonathan Swift and Marjorie Gordon have collaborated for 25 years, are familiar with the music of Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy and knew the singers before their deaths. Songs the two stars made famous will make up the "Evening of Nostalgia" Saturday in Mercy Conference Center.

## AAUW hosts film showing of 'The Dinner Party'

"The Dinner Party," the film which shows the creation of an artwork that celebrates the achievement of women past and present, will be shown at 7:45 p.m. Wednesday, May 18, in Farmington Hills Branch Library on 12 Mile, east of Farmington Road.

The program is hosted by Farmington Branch of American Association of University Women (AAUW) and is presented by Dr. Grace Stewart of Henry Ford Community College.

Guests are welcome without charge. July Chicago and 400 artists created 39 place settings for The Dinner Party that has toured the United States and

Europe over the past few years. The film tells about their work and philosophy in putting the massive display together.

Stewart is the director of the Focus on Women program at Henry Ford. She is presently involved in the Michigan Women's Studies Association and serves on the board of Detroit Women's Forum.

She will be teaching a new course this fall at the college called "Introduction to Women's Studies," which features a new perspective on all traditional courses. It will be the first time a course of this nature has been offered at the community college level.



The two blue ribbons given in the Farmington Artists Club spring exhibit were attached to "Old Man" by Nancy Hurd (at left) and to "Race" by Eleanor Neif. Both are Livonia residents.

## 2 take blue ribbons

By Lorraine McClish  
staff writer

Nancy Hurd and Eleanor Neif took the first-place awards after judging for Farmington Artists Club's spring exhibit. Both are residents of Livonia. Hurd took her win for "Old Man," which juror Carol Shier-Goodale said had "a masterful command of the media with conviction and understanding vision."

Neif's "Race" won for its "beautiful design, color and draftsmanship," the juror said. Second prizes went to Carolyn Dunphy from Northville for "Iris" and to Joan Welsh of Dearborn Heights for "Sea Denizens."

Third-place awards were given to Barbara Turney of Farmington, Annette Lind of Farmington and Jane Roebelleau of Warren. Of the 190 entries, 106 were accepted for the exhibit by the juror, who is assistant director of Pontiac Art Center.

Club members estimated that 1,900 persons saw the show, staged in Mercy Center.

TWO SETS of balloting are traditional in the club's annual exhibits. Club members honor their own by voting for their favorite work in the show,

and they also offer the show-goers a vote for their favorite work.

In the vote taken by the club members, Tom Hale, who had just been named "Artist-in-Residence for 1983" by Farmington Area Arts Commission, got the largest number of votes for his work called "Pier, Puget Sound."

Welsh followed Hale for "Sea Denizens." Edee Joppich came in third for "Ode to April."

In the popular voting by the show-goers, Hale won the top spot again for "Pier, Puget Sound." His work called "Masoco" was voted fourth most popular.

SECOND FAVORITE IN the popular vote category was "Making Over" by Martha Barnes, and third was "Butterfly and Thistles" by Jeanne Osment.

Under the direction of Gladys McMillan and her co-chairman Wynne Garlow, about 100 Farmington Artists Club members gave a total of 3,500 volunteer hours to plan and set up the exhibit, which is regarded as one of the largest and most prestigious in the area.

The exhibit is made possible through a grant from Michigan Council for the Arts and Farmington Area Arts Commission.

## Childbirth film to be shown

Lamaze Childbirth Education Association of Livonia shows the film, "The Caesarean Experience" at 7 p.m. Monday, May 23, in Room 107, St. Matthew's United Methodist Church, 30900 Six Mile Road. The film is designed for expectant parents who know or suspect they will need a Caesarean delivery.

A fee of \$3 per group is payable at the door.

The film will be followed by a question-and-answer period conducted by Marcy Zwally, a registered nurse and Caesarean mother, who will cover the aspects and procedures involved in a Caesarean delivery.

Attendance at this session will give the father the certificate required by Providence Hospital to be present at the Caesarean delivery.

A monthly Caesarean Birth Preparation Class also is offered by Lamaze Childbirth Education Association of Livonia. The instructor, an RN and Caesarean mother, covers such aspects as nutrition, fetal testing, anesthetics, surgical procedures, breastfeeding and coping with Caesarean birth.

For further information on the Caesarean class or the Lamaze classes, contact registrar Yvonne Bouchard at 464-1218.

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