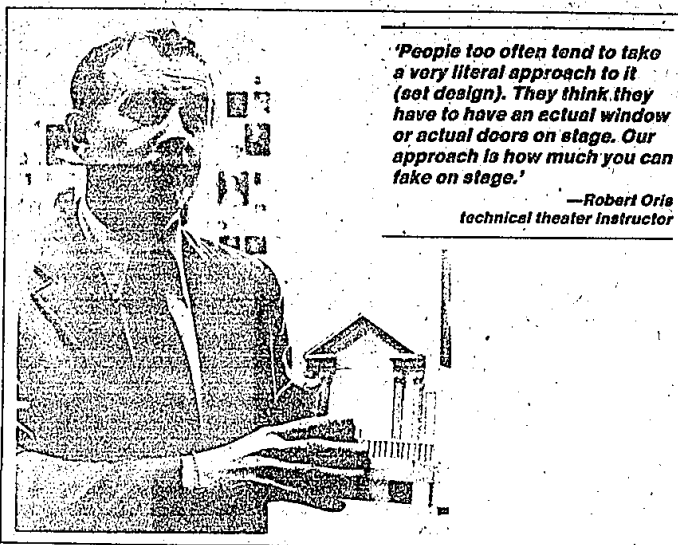


Instructor sets stage for theater workshops



'People too often tend to take a very literal approach to it (set design). They think they have to have an actual window or actual doors on stage. Our approach is how much you can fake on stage.'

**—Robert Oris
technical theater instructor**

By Mary Kiemo
staff writer

With the pulling of a curtain or the switching on of a light, Robert Oris can put you on a busy city street in the United States, or in a professor's library in England.

Oris isn't a magician but an instructor of technical theater at Dearborn's Henry Ford Community College. And he has helped many a community theater group with their productions of almost anything from "West Side Story" to "Chicago."

Theater groups often think their sets have to be realistic in every detail, said Oris, a Dearborn Heights resident.

"People too often tend to take a very literal approach to it," Oris said. "They think they have to have an actual window or actual doors on stage. Our approach is how much you can fake on stage."

ORIS IS TEACHING at a free workshop, being presented this week and Nov. 10-12 by the Theater Guild of Livonia-Redford. Set construction is the topic for the workshops that continue today through Saturday.

Set painting and decorating will be presented at the Nov. 10-12 workshop. It will feature basic techniques in cutting corners in scenery construction, such as measuring, cutting and fitting.

Theater sets can be constructed to resemble real life, or they can suggest a different time and place, according to Oris.

For a local production of the play "Chicago," set in that city some 60 years ago, Oris is preparing a backdrop that consists of enlargements of photos from the 1920s that were given an antique, sepia tint.

"It will be a collage of photographs across the back," Oris said. "It will give the atmosphere of Chicago in the '20s." The Broadway musical "Evita" uses a similar technique, he explained. In "Evita," a collage of pictures from Evita Peron's life served as a backdrop.

SCENERY CHANGES can be made quickly through the use of "revolves," in which wagons bring the scenes on stage. While the actors perform on the set facing the audience, stagehands prepare the next scene behind it. The set is then turned so the second scene faces the audience.

"Flippers" can change a set by adding or removing an object. For example, Oris said that productions of "The Sound of Music" have turned a ballroom into a bedroom just by bringing a bed on stage.

"You can go toward the symbolic," he said. "If you have something that gives you the feeling of a kitchen, you don't need the whole kitchen." The amount of money a local theater group spends on its sets can vary ac-

cording to the theater and the budget, Oris said.

"You can do shows on very, very small budgets," he said. "It depends on what you're doing with the sets. The average show usually spends \$150 on materials for the set. There have been shows that spent as much as \$5,000 on the set."

ORIS HAS noticed changes in theater sets in the 35 years he has been teaching and the 30 years he has been directing productions.

"They're much less literal," he said. "You used to have four, six, seven big sets for a play. Now you might have a curtain thrown across."

"There have been big musicals that had a single set," he said. "For 'Pippin' there was almost a bare stage throughout. More and more, they're using actors to decorate the set and are keeping away from walls."

A PLAY may not need elaborate scenery if the story itself is strong enough to carry the audience, Oris said. He cites the recent play "Agnes of God," which took place in the anteroom of a convent, as an example. The set for this play consisted of a plain wooden desk chair, a metal ashtray, a table and a beige backdrop.

"That's all you needed," Oris said. "There were no walls or windows, and

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—Robert Oris

It didn't bother the audience."

The sets for the different scenes in a play should be consistent, Oris advised. "If you have one elaborate scene, you can't skip on the others," he said.

Local productions have to watch costs and deadlines.

"With professionals, it's no problem," Oris said. "You say, 'I need that set at this time' and it's there. But here (locally), you're dealing with people who work days or nights. They might be able to make a meeting one day but not another."

Participants in Oris' workshops won't have to attend every session. The classes are being held at the Theater Guild Playhouse, 15138 Beech Daly just south of Five Mile in Redford. For more information call 523-0718.

New state art group launched

Concerned Citizens for the Arts (CCA) in Michigan will launch its inaugural committee session on Friday at Long's conference center in Lansing.

The statewide advisory committee is a cultural arts advocacy group

designed to provide sustained, organized support for the arts in Michigan.

CCA will announce the objectives of the organization at Friday's luncheon meeting and set the agenda for the upcoming year. Peter W. Stroh, chairman of the Stroh Brewery Co., has arranged for the company to underwrite the initial ground rule meeting and will serve as chairman of the new organization and as host of the first session.

Other guests of the meeting will include Gov. James Blanchard and keynote speaker, Kitty Carlisle Hart. Mrs. Hart, a well-known actress and chairwoman of the New York State Council for the Arts, comes to East Lansing as one of America's leading arts advocates.

Dr. Oscar Remick, chairman of the Michigan Council for the Arts and pres-

ident of Alma College, also will speak.

Among the goals are:

- 1) Providing effective lobby support for the annual state appropriation for the arts;

- 2) Broadening support and awareness of fine arts programs in corporate and private sectors;

- 3) Responding to arts issues under consideration by the state legislature and local communities;

- 4) Providing literature on the economic and social impact of the arts in Michigan; and

- 5) Serving as a vocal representative for concerned citizens.

Peter Stroh, long a supporter of the arts, is the organization's chairman.

"The intensifying debate over priorities, funding levels — both public and private — and the rate of economic recovery in Michigan reinforces the need for a citizens' advocacy group for the arts," he said.

"The arts play an essential role in building Michigan communities, contributing to the local and state econ-

omy and enriching the quality of life for citizens and visitors in Michigan."

"CCA will be a strong and visible voice supporting the work of Michigan artists, arts organizations, arts educators, volunteers and the many contributions other arts make to our state."

To ensure the necessary support for its activities, CCA is launching a membership campaign.

"This is a first for our state and we hope to inspire a passion for the arts just as they've inspired every great culture," said Barbara Carlisle, membership chairman of Lansing's Board of Theatre.

"We have set the first year's membership goal at 100,000 and we extend to all Michigan residents an enthusiastic invitation to join our efforts."

A \$5 membership will include a regular newsletter and mailings on public arts issues. For more information, contact Concerned Citizens for the Arts in Michigan, 485 S. Grand, Lansing, MI 48933. Make membership checks payable to Concerned Citizens for the Arts.

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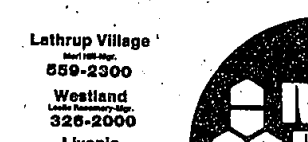
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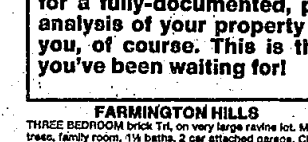
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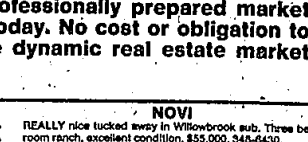
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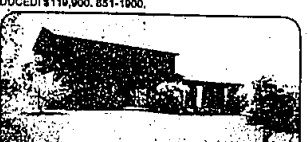


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