

# Meadow Brook stages stimulating drama

Performances of the Meadow Brook Theatre production of "The Magnificent Yankee" by Emmet Lavery continue through Nov. 27 on the Oakland University campus near Rochester. For ticket information call 377-3300.

By Cathie Brandeish  
special writer

"The Magnificent Yankee" is far from great theater, but it offers an uplifting evening's entertainment full of lively repartee, engaging characters and historical anecdotes.

## review

We Americans are insatiably curious about the private lives of the great and near great. This 1945 vintage biography by Emmet Lavery is an avowedly sentimental and patriotic homage to Oliver Wendell Holmes and his indomitable wife, Fanny.

The play presents the domestic side of Holmes' life during the years he sat on the Supreme Court, years framed by

the presidencies of the willful Roosevelts.

"The Magnificent Yankee" opens when Holmes is appointed to the court in 1902 during Teddy's years in office and closes in 1933 when FDR pays an inauguration-day visit to the venerable Justice Holmes.

PETER BRANDON does a creditable job as Holmes, the erect Bostonian whose view of the law as a living thing has shaped American jurisprudence since his years on the High Court. The play mentions only briefly the dramatic cases which made history

and the political maneuvering on the Supreme Court. It leaves the audience wanting to hear more, undoubtedly preferable to weighing the action down with ponderous legal complexities. Priscilla Morrill as Fanny Holmes may not be the dramatic center of the play, but she's its heart. Fanny Holmes was a lively 61 year old when the Holmeses came to Washington. With wit and charm, she manipulated pushy reporters, disgruntled presidents and her own brilliant husband.

Morrill's period costumes of white satin and brilliant velvets rivet our attention to this "great woman" behind

the "great man," and she wins us over. Morrill ages believably in the 30 years spanned by the play.

Part of what makes "The Magnificent Yankee" uplifting is the interaction between Holmes and Fanny. Even after 60 years of marriage, they still make jokes and get jealous. They chide, humor and support one another. Old age doesn't dull their wit or their will, and they remain contributing members of society into their 80s.

DURING THEIR years in Washington, a succession of 27 young men from Harvard Law School served as Justice

Holmes' secretaries. He was their respected mentor and they, his surrogate sons. They enriched his life and help us take a private measure of the public man.

People who made history inevitably play roles in this play about a man who influenced the course of the nation for more than half a century. We hear tales about Teddy Roosevelt, Taft and FDR.

We meet Justice Brandeis who was Holmes' long-time friend. David Regal portrays Brandeis as a likeable man of humble integrity who justly deserves a place in history.

# Locally produced albums don't bring fame, fortune



DAVID FRANK/staff photographer

Sheila Landis of Rochester has produced and released her fourth album, "Singer/Songwriter."

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"If a big record store chain in Minneapolis wants a thousand of your records, and you're crazy enough to send those thousand records, you don't know if you'll ever see any of your money."

Jack Brokensha, the violinist who was once a member of the internationally known and off-recorded Australian Jazz Quintet in the 1950s, knows the pitfalls of the record business as well as anyone.

His last self-produced album was "Nice & Easy" on his own MSI label. Investing in an album for him is like advertising for a major brand company.

"It's part of the general business side of the music business," Brokensha said. "If you work clubs a lot, the first thing a club owner wants to know is if you have a record. It's just good public relations."

BROKENSHA, a West Bloomfield resident, has also helped some local musicians produce their albums. However, his wife Shirley, whom Brokensha refers to as the "practical" one in their family, said it's painful for her to watch young musicians spending large amounts of money in pursuit of what may only be a fantasy.

"Musicians have the illusion of selling 30,000-40,000 albums," she said, "when they are lucky to

sell three or four hundred."

"Recording an album is a very expensive proposition, and in the old days the record companies used to pay for them. Of course, you still paid for it, but not up-front like today."

As she finds with her husband's records, Shirley Brokensha said that distribution is the one problem local musicians cannot easily overcome. "Many local musicians can get a few of their albums in the record stores but the stores don't say, 'Bring me a hundred records and I'll put them up on the wall along with a big poster.'"

"They don't want to hear about that. They want a rock record or something in the Top 40."

Nevertheless, musicians continue to record albums and many still have the big dream of getting a national hit, national distribution and a recording contract with a major record company.

Most are not, publicly at least, that naive. "We're not out looking to make a big name for ourselves and lots of money," Katalenic said. "We're just looking for something to keep us going as a band. A record is a finished product that tells people everywhere we've arrived."

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