

Berman brings own magic to 'Kuni-Leml'

Performances of the Birmingham Theatre production of the musical comedy "Kuni-Leml" continue through Sunday, June 30. For ticket information call 644-3533.

Good things can indeed come in small packages, and "Kuni-Leml," the small-scale musical currently at the Birmingham Theatre, brings a big load of joyous laughter, terrific songs and delightful characterizations.

A tale of Jewish families in czarist Russia, the show has often been called "the poor man's 'Fiddler on the Roof.'" This is a misnomer because "Kuni-

Leml" is a perfect gem of a musical in its own right.

The two musicals do share some very universal themes — the conflict between generations and the difficulty of holding on to traditions in a rapidly changing world.

Reb Pinkhos (Shelley Berman), a prosperous Hasid, has engaged the local matchmaker (Gene Varrone) to find his daughter a suitable husband from a good religious family. Kuni-Leml (Stuart Zagitt) is the mate selected, but Carolina (Patricia Ben Peterson) has a mind of her own and prefers her penniless and secular tutor Max (Joseph Kolinski).

MAX DECIDES to masquerade as his cousin Kuni-Leml and thus marry Carolina by trickery. Meanwhile, the matchmaker's daughter Libe (Liz Larsen) pines for a husband of her own. It's merry mayhem when soon there are two Kuni-Lemls, two Carolinas and two confused fathers.

Berman plays Pinkhos to perfection. With sighs, hand gestures and meaningful silences, he has embellished the original role, bringing warmth and depth to the character without overdoing the comic aspects.

Known primarily as a comedian, Berman holds his own in the vocal de-



Barbara Michals

partment. "A Meeting of the Minds" is a charming duet with Carolina when it appears she agrees to marry the man her father has chosen. In "A Little Learning," the distraught father laments that he never was swayed by the new liberalism and allowed his daughter a secular education.

As Reb Kalmann, the matchmaker, Varrone is marvelous. While his jaunty bowler and checked jacket (with matching skullcap) suggest a charlatan, Varrone's twinkling eyes, jovial manner, and rich, booming voice make him a lovable rogue.

Anyone ever confronted with an undesirable blind date will roar with recognition when Varrone extols that "The Boy Is Perfect" while he glosses over Kuni-Leml's failings: a limp, a squint, a hump, a stutter and a little deafness.

ZAGITT, WHO created the title role in the New York production, does a masterful job of portraying all of Kuni-Leml's considerable imperfections. Despite being the brunt of a lot of low humor, Zagitt imbues his character with gentleness and sincerity.

Peterson and Larsen are both spirited performers with strong voices, although Peterson's verges on harshness at times. Kolinski is convincingly earnest as Max and has a pleasing voice. He also does a nice job mimicking Zagitt's movements.

Jack Savage and Adam Heller, who double as Max's university pals and Pinkhos' Hasidic friends, dash through costume and character changes with great energy. In the Hasidic tradition of joyous celebration, they romp through two of the show's liveliest numbers, "Celebrate!" and "Be Fruitful



Reb Pinkhos (Shelley Berman), a prosperous Hasid, engages the local matchmaker (Gene Varrone) to find his daughter a suitable husband from a good religious family in "Kuni-Leml."

and Multiply."

All of the songs by Raphael Crystal and Richard Engquist are delightfully and hummable. "Lovesongs and Lullabies" is perhaps the prettiest.

While director Rian Avni has this production a little less frenetic than the New York one, the pace is still unremittingly lively and the characterizations are better developed as well.

SHOWCASE CINEMAS

BERLIN LINE
STARTS THURSDAY
GOONIES [R] A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET [R]

PONTIAC 2-3-4-5
STARTS FRIDAY
RAMBO, FIRST BLOOD PART 2 [R] BREWSTER'S MILLIONS [R]

PONTIAC 3-7-8-9-10
STARTS FRIDAY
GOONIES [R] GOTCHA [R]

SUMMIT PRIZE CINEMAS
STARTS FRIDAY
A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET [R]

RAMBO, FIRST BLOOD PART 2 [R] A VIEW TO A KILL [R]

PERFECT [R] FRATERNITY VACATION [R] MASK [R]

FLETCH [R] BEVERLY HILLS COP [R]

FRATERNITY VACATION [R]

GOONIES [R] GOTCHA [R]

BEVERLY HILLS COP [R] FLETCH [R]

BREWSTER'S MILLIONS [R]

MASK [R] POLICE ACADEMY 2 [R]

Dave Valentin to perform at Hotel Pontchartrain's P'Jazz

Making his first P'Jazz appearance, award-winning flautist Dave Valentin will appear at 6:30 p.m. Monday, June 10, on the terrace of the Hotel Pontchartrain in downtown Detroit.

Local fusion group Orange Lake Drive will

play at 6 p.m. Wednesday, June 12. WDET personality Nkenge Zola will host both concerts. Tickets are \$11 for reserved seating, \$8 for general admission. For more information call 965-0200, Ext. 3766 or 3968.

Valentin's band record-

ed "Kalahari," his latest album, live in the studio, to recapture the spontaneity of classic 1960s jazz sessions. Musical in-

fluences stem from a hybrid of funk, R&B and classical.

Orange Lake Drive is making its fourth appearance at P'Jazz.

Tom Dean to host 5th annual Boblo Fireworks Cruise benefit

WCLS radio personality Tom Dean will emcee the fifth annual March of Dimes Boblo Fireworks

Cruise on Monday, July 1. The cruise takes place in conjunction with the annual downtown Detroit riverfront fireworks display.

Cruise-goers will get a view of the fireworks,

hear dance band Higher Ground and see break-dancing group the Dominators.

Tickets to the cruise are \$17.50 per person, including entertainment plus food — a submarine

sandwich, potato chips and apple pie.

March of Dimes fight birth defects. For further information call 423-3200.

Proceeds help the

DINING AND ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE

ON THE TOWN

WAYN, Wayne State University's student-run radio station, will present the movie "URGH! A Music War" at 7 and 9:30 p.m. Saturday at the General Lectures Building on the corner of Warren Avenue and Anthony Wayne Drive on campus in Detroit.

Tickets at \$3.50 are available at the door. Proceeds will benefit WSU Student Radio's relocation

Film has new wave, punk, reggae bands

and new equipment costs.

"URGH!" is a 124-minute live concert film, which captures performances of nearly three dozen new wave, punk and reggae bands. Filmed in 1980 in London, Paris, Los Angeles and New York, it features such artists as Police, Go-Go's, Devo, Gingo Boingo, OMD and UB40. This uncut version also includes Magazine, Pere Ubu and the Members.

Top Off Your Evening

...at the Haymarket.

Friday and Saturday, from 10 PM 'til 1:30 AM, wind down or even dance to soft, classical jazz served up by the Jimmy Dixon Quartet featuring vocalist Gwen Wells.

Catch a late night bite—light foods and snacks, table-side salads, tempting desserts from the fruit and pastry cart. Cocktails and cappuccino.

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