

Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



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Actors help one another

By Cathie Broidenbach
special writer

THERE'S SOMETHING new stirring in the theatrical community. Last June, a group of actors and directors founded the Detroit Actors Collective as a support and networking group for those in the Detroit area who work professionally in theater, television and commercial film.

Every Monday night when most theaters are dark, they meet to exchange news of upcoming auditions as well as to support one another and provide opportunities to develop professional skills. They talk shop and sometimes swap props.

The group is small with 10 core members plus their guests, and until recently they met in a member's home. The format of meetings varies according to the needs of the members. Sometimes members critique one another as they read scripts to prepare for upcoming auditions. From time to time they invite a specialist to a meeting to lead the discussion, and next summer, they plan to sponsor a weekend workshop featuring instructors from Herbert Berghof and Uta Hagen's acting school in New York.

Meetings sometimes center on reading new plays by area playwrights because a goal of the Detroit Actors Collective is to foster original theater in the Detroit area.

PERFORMERS, better than others, know it's a Catch 22 proposition for an unknown playwright to get an original play produced. Most theaters are unwilling to take a chance on a new play unless it's already had a successful run, and it doesn't stand a chance of having that successful run unless some theater gets things rolling by daring to produce it in the first place.

Last spring the Detroit Actors Collective launched Kitty Dublin's play "Mirrors" in a public reading. Some of those who heard the reading decided the play warranted a full production. "Mirrors" is now playing at the State Fair Theatre through Saturday, March 1.

'Lots of people think an original play is probably avant-garde and obscure. Mine isn't. It's middle of the road, middle American.'

— Jan Radcliff

Detroit Actors Collective will present another original play, "All of the Monkeys" by Jan Radcliff, a Birmingham playwright and multifaceted entertainer. The comedy will debut as a full production at 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, Feb. 21-22, and Thursday-Friday, Feb. 27-28, at the Knox Auditorium of the First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham.

Arthur Beer, celebrated actor and member of the University of Detroit Theatre Department, will direct.

Radcliff said of Beer, "He has a wonderful comedic sense and the actors love working with him because he's such a good actor himself."

The production is "very much a collaboration," with Radcliff producing and consulting on all facets of its first staging.

Radcliff said the cooperative arrangement is "better for me as a playwright than it would be to see the play produced in an established theater."

Working closely with the experienced Beer gives her an opportunity to polish the play as it moves toward opening night, and to see what works before a live audience and what doesn't.

THE PLAYWRIGHT has already added three short scenes to her two-act comedy about a successful 40-year-old novelist who is trying to sort out what the patterns in his life mean.

"LOTS OF people think an original play is probably avant-garde and obscure. Mine isn't," she said. "It's middle of the road, middle America."

Radcliff, a native of the southwest, spent 10 years as a singer with a group that presented a Las Vegas-type act featuring a variety of popular music. She wrote song lyrics and even cut several records.

"I don't sing a lick now and I have no desire to go back into a bar six nights a week, but I like singing," she said. "It's just not a form of expression for me."

A number of years ago, she moved to Birmingham where she lives with her husband, Rip, a director of industrial films, and with her young son and daughter. In the Detroit area, she has worked on

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STEPHEN CANTRELL/Staff photographer

"All of the Monkeys" by Birmingham playwright Jan Radcliff will premiere at the Detroit Actors Collective on Friday-Saturday, Feb. 21-22, and Thursday, Feb. 27-28, at the First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham. The play is a comedy about a man who reflects on and discovers all the monkeys in one significant moment of his life — his wedding day. For tickets at \$6, call 642-4838.

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