

Suburban Life

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With flair

Artistic director puts the spotlight on college theater

By Richard Lech
staff writer

JAMES HARTMAN has acted in everything from Shakespeare to television commercials.

In one of his more unusual roles, he played a time-traveling Abraham Lincoln in a made-for-TV movie.

"It was a four-hour makeup job," Hartman recalled, "and when it was done I stood there waving my hands because I looked in the mirror and didn't see my own reflection."

Hartman's latest role, though, is behind the scenes, setting the stage for a revitalization of the theater program at Schoolcraft College in Livonia.

The Farmington Hills resident is in his third year as the artistic director of the Schoolcraft theater.

He oversees the college's theater curriculum, teaches and puts on three plays per year at the college theater. This January, he will be made a full-time member of the college faculty.

HARTMAN'S GOAL has been to put the spotlight on the Schoolcraft theater program, making it more of a presence at the college. He figures

he has made quite a bit of progress on that.

The program has gone from what he described as "little or no theater courses" to such offerings as acting I and II, stagecraft and lighting, history of the theater and oral interpretation of literature.

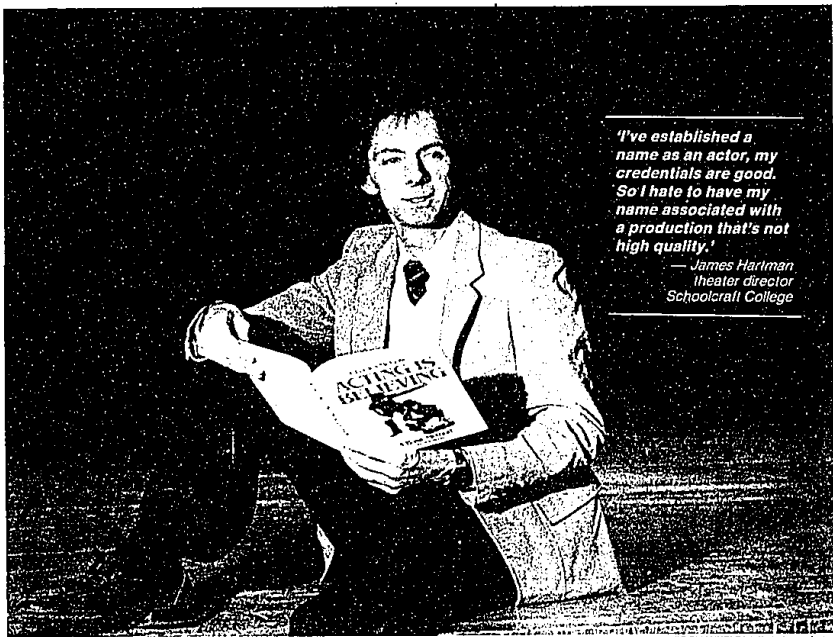
The program also has increased its number of annual shows from two to three, and the number of performances per show from four to six. The first offering this year, "The Man Who Came to Dinner," had the largest cast ever at the college — 35 — and played to packed, sometimes sell-out audiences.

Hartman said the theater program's increasing profile is "partly because I do a tremendous amount of publicity. I think visibility is an important part of a theater program."

HARTMAN ALSO said his own commitment to professionalism has helped the program.

The holder of a doctorate from Indiana University, Hartman came to Schoolcraft with 11 years of theater-teaching experience at the University of Cincinnati and Indiana University. Three of his students eventually performed on Broadway.

Trained as a Shakespearean actor,



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— James Hartman
theater director
Schoolcraft College

ART EMANUEL/staff photographer

Hartman also has branched out to lighter roles in industrial films, television commercials and in the TV films "Jimmy B and Andre" (with Alex Karras) and his as-yet-unreleased "Lincoln at Little Rock."

He first came to Michigan to appear in a play at Meadow Brook. He began working at Schoolcraft as a guest director in 1982.

"I've established a name as an actor, my credentials are good," he said. "So I hate to have my name associated with a production that's not high quality."

He stresses to his students that while they're play acting they're not playing around.

"We don't fool around in rehearsal. We have a good time, or they wouldn't put in all those hours. But they know it's a serious thing they're doing."

The rehearsals are kept on a tight schedule. After two weeks, the actors are told to have their scripts memorized so they can spend the remaining four weeks working on characterization.

"By the time the play reaches production, the students are very comfortable and confident, and that's extremely important to be believable on stage."

THE NEXT presentation will be the classic Greek tragedy "Oedipus the King" in March, followed by "On Golden Pond" later in the spring.

The small Schoolcraft theater (the stage is 22 feet by 17 1/2 feet and the auditorium seats 171) isn't conducive to large-scale musicals or any other plays requiring a lot of scene changes. But it is ideal for smaller-scale, intimate plays, Hartman said.

"When students first come in here from high school, where they're used to huge, cavernous theaters. They're surprised at how small it is. But I always tell them it's a wonderful theater to be in, because no matter where you sit there's no problem seeing or hearing or feeling part of the production."

"And the actors can even hear the members of the audience breathing and making comments."

The difference in working at a two-year as opposed to four-year school, Hartman said, is that few of his current students are committed to acting as a career. But he still found them "exciting" to work with.

"In some ways it's an advantage because they haven't developed the egotistical outlook some people develop who are into it full time."

BUT SCHOOLCRAFT students entering Hartman's introductory acting courses often are in for a surprise. Instead of reading lines from plays, they are more apt to be learning how to lose their inhibitions.

Hartman employs exercises designed to increase the students' sensitivity and concentration and their fluidity of movement on stage. He is considering writing an acting book incorporating some of the techniques he uses.

One exercise calls for students to jog on stage, waving their hands and "vocalizing."

"The average person going by and looking in is going to think it's something bizarre and strange. It looks pretty chaotic and bizarre, but it all has a function in training the actors."

HARTMAN SAID he continually adds to his own training. In the summer of 1985, for instance, he took part in workshops at the Stratford Shakespearean Festival in Ontario. Last summer he worked with top European experts on stage movement at workshops in West Virginia.

Acting can sometimes be physically demanding, Hartman has found.

In "Jimmy B. and Andre" Hartman was called on to play an alcoholic. Since his total alcoholic intake amounts to about two rum-and-Cokes a year, Hartman had to improvise to get the right effect.

"I kept myself up all night, so my face was drawn, my eyes red and my walk a little uneven," he said. "And it worked very well."

Three years ago he played Lincoln in "Lincoln at Little Rock," a story about Abraham Lincoln being transported in time to 1957 and the racial disturbances at Little Rock, Ark. The film has not been shown yet, but Hartman is hoping it will wind up on cable TV.

He had to spend 10 or 12 hours a day acting in the Lincolnesque makeup, which took a toll on his skin.

"When they took off the makeup, the side of my nose would crack and bleed."

Although he enjoyed his movie roles, Hartman prefers the stage to the screen.

"I love the theater more. I like a live audience. I like to go through a script from beginning to end. Plus in films you go over the same shot over and over and over again. I like the excitement of live performing."

Buy smart

'But never pay full price,' says the Underground Shopper

By Louise Okrusky
special writer

Sue Goldstein, who's made shop 'til you drop into something of an art form as well as a business venture, has returned to spot consumer trends and retailing tricks in another of her underground shopper books.

Recently, she stopped in Southfield on her way through a tour touting her "Secrets from the Underground Shopper." The former Royal Oak school teacher still adheres to her own 11th commandment, "Buy smart, but never pay full price."

This time around, Goldstein isn't making her way through a jungle of outlet malls or off-price stores. She's working her way through mail order catalogs and taking a second look at marketing and retail practices, which affect price.

HER BASIC secret isn't anything magical. She's telling shoppers what their mothers have probably already told them: Check the seams inside the clothing before you buy, and don't believe any promise that sounds too good to be true.

Good advice, especially since Goldstein says the next trend in off-price shopping will be mail order catalogs.

"In the 1980s there are still outlet malls, but some of these stores aren't doing well. Consumers didn't

want to wade through items. Now they're beginning to mail order direct from the merchant. And you have off-price stores that offer enormous volume and quality at a discount."

"People don't want to feel cheated, or as if they're being cheap," she said.

In the 1970s, she says, buyers were store loyal. Ten years later, they're brand loyal. It's that kind of brand loyalty that's led to the success of mail order houses.

IN SOME minds catalogs are still associated with pictures of second-rate merchandise printed on poor quality paper. Today's mail order catalogs are changing their image.

"Ten to 12 years ago, the pictures looked like a million dollars and when you got the merchandise, it was garbage," said Don Ball, president of Imoco, a housewares mail order firm. His business is mentioned favorably in Goldstein's book and he's been touring with her.

"Brand-name merchants didn't want to be involved in discounts by mail. They were afraid they'd lose their retail business," Ball said.

That wasn't necessarily so, according to Ball. "More people are going to go into stores," he said. His first brand-name discount arrangement was with Samsontite. "It was semisuccessful. They didn't discount

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enough to us," he said.

Business picked up when Corning Glassware agreed to an arrangement. They were very, very selective. They checked me out from my toes to the top of my head." Now, he says, his firm is the country's largest marketer of Corningware. That company's approval opened the door to General Electric, Sylvania and American Tourister.

BALL WON'T vouch for the entire mail order industry. Caution remains a consumer's best weapon, he warns. "Look for lots of bad names in a catalog," he said. "Most quality catalogs specialize. The most successful mail order companies are not everything to every-

body," Goldstein said.

Ball also advises checking with the Better Business Bureau. The BBB, however, can't advise a buyer to patronize a concern. Instead, it can only report the number of complaints lodged against a company.

"Be careful how you interpret the report," Ball said. "No matter what mail order company you're dealing with, someone has lodged a complaint against it. The reports will say either 'some complaints' or 'many complaints.' Check to see if there are a large number of unsatisfied customers."

When ordering he suggests never sending cash. It's easily lost or stolen and leaves the buyer with no record of having paid for the merchandise. Also, write legibly. Include your full address. Remember to complete the order form, including an indication of the size, amount and color you want. Double check the total amount your order will cost. Arithmetic errors can delay merchandise.

Always keep a record of the name of the mail order firm and its address in case you want to return the item. "I have an order sitting in my warehouse right now. The person didn't buy the merchandise from me. We don't carry it," Ball said.

ANOTHER TYPE of mail order that is slowly coming into its own is shopping via cable television.

"It's television. It's entertainment first. There's a frenzy about it," said Goldstein. "It's impulse. The consumer wants to say 'sing it to me.' There's that romance of having someone who's good looking describe this product to you while you sit in your own home."

But what you hear isn't always what you get. "The media is different," Ball said. "You can say something is gold on television. But if we put it in print we have to say gold plated or gold covered. Television is not yet bound by these rules."

WHETHER THEY use catalogs or television to pitch their wares, merchants know the demographics of mail order shoppers favors them.

A decade ago, the average catalog shopper looking for discount prices earned a family income of \$18,000 and had a high school education. Now the catalogs are attracting people with family incomes of \$45,000. The average age of these buyers is 45.

"They have more leisure time and want to do something other than shopping," Goldstein said.

Elderly shoppers are also drawn to mail order businesses. "They're not so mobile," Ball said. "They fear for their safety or they have arthritis and fear being jostled. For many it's a physical effort to go shopping. They prefer the convenience of mail."

NO MATTER how one shops, in stores or by mail, Goldstein suggests planning some purchases for the coming year.