

Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



(BWT, R, F, J, S, C)

Thursday, April 2, 1987 O&E



Cathie Breidenbach

Bill Kux charms as nerdish hero

Performances of Woody Allen's "Play It Again, Sam" continue through Sunday, April 19, at Meadow Brook Theatre on the Oakland University campus in Rochester Hills. For ticket information, call the box office at 377-3300.

The wonder of the variously named characters who play Woody Allen clones is that he can make women fall for a whiney neurotic with owl eyes on a scrawny chicken body and make macho men almost sorry for a wimp who blathers in public about his sexual insecurities.

In Meadow Brook's funny "Play It Again, Sam," Bill Kux pulls off the tough job of playing the Woody Allen character. He's splendid. Maybe it's because he's better looking than Allen. The chicken chest has filled out and the peculiar charm of the Allen character is not so incomprehensible as it is with the pallid nebbish of Allen himself.

"Play It Again, Sam" is Woody Allen's 1960s commentary on the contemporary mating game. When the wife of Allan Felix, an intellectual

urban nerd, walks out on him, his friends, Dick and Linda, step in to raise his spirits and find him some female companionship. Allan makes a fool of himself with a succession of women.

Felix's hyperactive imagination provides the best comedy in "Play It Again, Sam." When his imagination kicks into high gear, the lighting dims and the audience gets to see the people in his fevered thought.

BECAUSE WOODY Allen/Allen Felix has a movie fetish, film characters come alive and kibbly over his shoulder. Bogart, his ultimate hero, coaches Allen on how to make time with "dames."

Robert Grossman re-creates Bogart's voice and his nonchalant macho saunter. His fine acting brings the essence of Bogart to life on the Meadow Brook stage. With reverence and no apologies, Allen steals whole speeches as well as the title for "Play It Again, Sam" from the movie "Casablanca."

Peter Hicks cleverly designed the set with multiple hidden escapes to

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Helen Zucker

They've got gusto, doing Simon comedy

Performances of Neil Simon's "Come Blow Your Horn," presented by the Troy Players, continue at 8 p.m. Fridays-Saturdays through April 11 at the Troy Community Center. For ticket information, call 524-3484.

The Troy Players production of "Come Blow Your Horn," directed by Connie Patrick, is bright and funny.

Neil Simon's witty script tells about the coming of age of the two sons of a waxed-fruit manufacturer. The cast of seven brings energy to enacting Simon's dizzy but well-

crafted play. What the players lack in polish is made up for by sheer gusto. To Delight in the funny lines carries across the footlights.

Joe Burdick's set design is wonderful. Chris Locke, Dee Chalfant, Terry Dierberger and everyone connected with the final set deserve congratulations. The door through which all the wrong people enter at the wrong time is located in exactly the right place. So is the phone, the charcoal nude, the bar and everything else.

Rich Fleming is adroit as older

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It isn't easy Despite changes, shows go on

By Ethel Simmons
staff writer

ESTABLISHING ITS FIRST theater season at the Jewish Community Center in West Bloomfield hasn't been easy for Nancy Gurwin Productions.

The first show ("Funny Girl") was a hit, the second ("The Diary of Anne Frank") was a flop. The third — rescheduled from the musical "Anything Goes," which was to open in April — will be a familiar Gurwin vehicle, the musical "I Do I Do" for late summer.

Gurwin co-stars in the two-person play, about 50 years in the lives of a married couple.

GURWIN, a Southfield resident who is executive producer of Nancy Gurwin Productions, and Donna Zatklin, also of Southfield, who is producer of the theater company, talked about their upcoming plans over lunch last week at Matus Red Fox in Bloomfield Township.

Besides the upcoming show at the Jewish Community Center (community theater, not dinner theater productions) and the dinner theater at Mama Mia's, there is Gurwin's one-woman show to be considered, and the scheduling of the next season at the JCC.

Michael Goodman, a former associate, asked Gurwin to bring her shows to the JCC when Dr. Morton Plotnick, the JCC's executive director, asked Goodman to help in starting a theater season there.

The season opened with "Funny Girl," starring Gurwin as the comical Ziegfeld Follies star Fanny Brice.

"It just took off. Even the Sunday matinees were terrific," said Gurwin of the show's eight performances.

Deciding on a change of pace, Gurwin's group went with the somber Broadway hit, "The Diary of Anne Frank," about the young Jewish girl and her family hiding from the Nazis in World War II.

"We had an artistic success," said producer Zatklin.

"But a financial disaster," finished Gurwin. The critics liked it, but the public, surprisingly, stayed away in droves.

Goodman, who also played a role in "Anne Frank," ended his participation with the new community theater after this show.

ALTHOUGH Gurwin has done "I Do I Do" before (as well as "Fun-



Nancy Gurwin will play Agnes again in "I Do I Do" this time in late summer at the Jewish Community Center in West Bloomfield, where her Nancy Gurwin Productions is offering a theater season.

'We had an artistic success,'

— Donna Zatklin
Producer

ny Girl"), Plotnick asked her to do the show again. Gurwin, who started her production company 11 years ago, first appeared in "I Do I Do" with Phil Marcus Esser of Livonia, in 1976.

One of the difficulties in presenting shows at the JCC, Gurwin and Zatklin agreed, is the scheduling, because there are so many other activities also being booked there.

Rehearsal time, in the Aaron DeJoy Studio Theatre where the shows are presented, often is not available, and actors have to prepare their parts in rooms other than those in which they will perform.

Sets need to be uncomplicated because they can't be kept in the theater during the rehearsal period and run of the show because of competing events.

Gurwin is thinking of doing "I Do I Do" at the JCC outdoors, "under the stars," as she did "South Pacific" at the Botsford Inn in the summer of 1983.

The show will probably not open until after she does "Fantasticks" with the actor who is the replacement for the role of El Gallo, at Mama Mia. The same actor might be considered to costar in "I Do I Do."

"Fantasticks" has been moved from an opening date in May to

'It just took off. Even the Sunday matinees were terrific.'

— Nancy Gurwin

June. That means "I Do I Do" will have a late summer opening. Because of the Sabbath, there can be no activity on Saturdays at the JCC until after sundown, so the show could start as late as 9:30 p.m. Zatklin said they're going to check the calendar, hoping for an earlier sunset and starting time, maybe in August.

The new season, for 1987-88, will begin with the musical "Gypsy" — Gurwin will star as Mama Rose — in October. Neil Simon's "Come Blow Your Horn" the following March; and "Guys and Dolls," next April.

Gurwin is trying to do more package shows, which are easy to transport and present at various locations, such as her one-woman show called "Tribute to Broadway."

THE ONE-WOMAN show is going to be given at McDonald Towers, a senior citizens residence in Southfield, at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, June 13. The show at McDonald Towers is open to the public, and there is an admission charge. Call 354-9362 for more information.

Other performances of "Tribute to Broadway" are scheduled for the Danish Club in Detroit in May and at Beth Achim in Southfield on either Oct. 31 or Nov. 15. Of the two dates at the synagogues, Gurwin said, "These are conservative, orthodox synagogues that have not brought in this kind of entertainment."

In "Tribute to Broadway," Gurwin does excerpts from "Mame," "Guys and Dolls," "Fiddler on the Roof" and "Anything Goes," for the first half of the show.

The second half is a chronological tribute to Ethel Merman. Gurwin will sing many of the brassy star's hits and her son, Danny, will play Merman's leading men. Also appearing is "this other extraordinary singer," Gary Lee Temple of Plymouth. Ed Guest III of Birmingham narrates.

Cable 8 of Southfield has asked to tape the show, for showing on the local channel, and Gurwin said she probably will agree to the taping.

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