

Audience shares in show's fun

By Marie McGee
staff writer

TAP rhymes with clap. And — like it or not — that's what you'll wind up doing at the Novi Hilton's first try at dinner theater. Maybe even some woo-wooing.

Clapping, singing and musically tooting your horn are all part of the TAP act designed to get the audience involved. And it works.

Appropriately called "Applause on Broadway," the rollicking hourlong show is a presentation of West Bloomfield-based Theatre Arts Production (its acronym is TAP), headed by Michael Klier.

And it's not your run-of-the-mill dinner theater where passivity is a main ingredient.

"Applause" has a lot of fun sandwiched between specialty numbers by the TAP performers who "work" the audience like the pros they are. Much of the merriment is generated by the audience itself at the persistence of a clever and versatile cast that is somewhat hindered by a smallish stage.

"Applause" begins rather benignly with a sit-back-and-listen format: TAP's accompanist Rebecca at the keyboard playing the soothing "Chair de Lune." You've just had dinner in the Garden Place, and Debussy provides agreeable music to digest your meal by. It's almost too good to be true.

But just as you're settling down in the comfy theater-like seats in the Hilton's Forum mini-theater, the tempo quickly changes as the TAP performers come charging down the aisle with a combined version of "Celebration" and "Welcome to the Theater."

review

And before you know what hit you, they have you shaking hands and nodding hello to everyone around you to the tune of "Consider Yourself at Home." It's an "icebreaker" technique that works well. And things are never quite the same again for the rest of the evening.

The many moods and melodies of Broadway music highlighted in the show are done well by Rick Ingram, Larry Johnson and Earl Vinson, all Detroiters who also appear at the Premier Center, and Melanie Churella, the current Miss Farmington.

The "bebop" music of the '60s was especially good. So was Ingram's "Ain't Misbehavin'." Larry Johnson's "Mama" was a poignant offering — especially since Mother's Day was the next day.

More fun comes when the audience is invited to add "woo woo" after verses of "Chattanooga Choo Choo." The fun crescendos with a name-that-clue segment in which the cast sings the introduction of a song indicated on a clue sheet and the audience tries to name the tune — but not before the end of the intro. Winners are rewarded, of course.

The success factor of total audience involvement is evident in men's vs. women voices in "Take Me Out to the Ballgame." So close is the contest that Rebecca is asked to make the call. (The women won.)

It should be noted at this point, however, that the cast changes from

week to week "to keep it fresh," Klier notes. But the show's format remains basically the same.

The Novi is offering three dinner-theater packages: dinner and theater for \$25 per person; dinner, theater and "bed and breakfast," which includes overnight accommodations and breakfast in bed for \$55 per person; or the show alone for \$9. Show-

time is 9:30 p.m. on Saturdays only through June 13.

Dinner choices in the Garden Cafe are grilled swordfish or prime rib but the staff will bend a little for those on special diets. The show takes place in the Forum, a few short steps from the cafe. For reservations and information, call 349-4000.

The TAP show is part of several new offerings the Novi Hilton management is planning. In the fall, for instance, another dinner theater package will be offered as well as events like a glamour weekend with makeup artist Jeffrey Bruce.



STEPHEN GANTRELL/staff photographer

Bill Kircher (left) is Jud Fry, Gary Jones is Curly and Karen Teegarden is Laurey in the St. Dunstan's Guild production of the musical "Oklahoma!" opening Friday, May 29, at the outdoor Greek Theatre at Cranbrook in Bloomfield Hills. The show runs through Saturday, June 6. For ticket information call 644-0527.

upcoming things to do

BLUEGRASS FESTIVAL

WDET's eighth annual Bluegrass Festival will be held from noon to 7 p.m. Sunday, May 31, at the Meadow Brook Music Festival site at Baldwin Pavilion on the Oakland University campus in Rochester Hills. The festival will feature the Tony Rice Unit, Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown, Hot Rize (with Red Knuckles and the Trailblazers) and the Chenille Sisters. Tickets are \$9.50 in advance, \$12.50 at the gate. Tickets are available at all CTC Ticket Master outlets. For more information call 577-4146. Children 12 and under are admitted free.

AUDITIONS OPEN

Lathrup Youththeatre will hold auditions for its summer production of "Listen to the Children," an adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen's "The Emperor's New Clothes," at 1 p.m. Saturday-Sunday, May 30-31, at the Lathrup Municipal Building in Lathrup Village. Children ages 5-18, regardless of residence or experience, are being invited to participate in the program sponsored by the Lathrup Recreation Department. There is a \$10 membership fee. For more information contact Jo Anne Lamun, producer/director, at 559-3893.

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