

Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



Thursday, October 1, 1987 O&E

(107C)



Barbara Michals

Actors outstanding in 'Sunshine Boys'

The Birmingham Village Players production of "The Sunshine Boys" by Neil Simon continues through Saturday at the playhouse in Birmingham. For ticket information call 644-2075 any time.

By Barbara Michals
special writer

Exceptionally fine performances mark the Birmingham Village Players' "The Sunshine Boys," the production that kicks off its 65th season. The Neil Simon comedy is the story of an old vaudeville comedy team, Lewis and Clark (Phil Whelan and Dike Dwelley), who split up 11 years ago and haven't spoken since. Now they have a chance to reunite for one last performance, a comic legacy to younger generations. Old age and years of resentment have taken their toll, leaving the two cantankerous old men to a battle of wits.

From the moment he first shuttles across the stage in raggedy slippers to answer the phone when it's the tea kettle that's whistling — Dwelley completely endears himself to the audience. Though he can be madly stubborn and forgetful, Dwelley makes it clear there's plenty of the wily fox left in Willie Clark. Unwilling to accept retirement, Dwelley's Clark has slipped into the role of curmudgeon with great relish. He amuses himself plotting revenge against Lewis, deliberately aggravating his devoted nephew,

Ben (James Fuller), or bailing his nurse (Phyllis Livingstone).

WHELAN'S LEWIS at first appears all mild manners and good intentions. Soon, however, there surfaces the annoying little habits that drove Clark nuts for their 43-year partnership. Looking wizened and arthritic, Whelan contrasts nicely with the lanky and languid Dwelley. Both actors have flawless delivery and imbue their characters with credibility and dignity as well as humor.

Fuller is fine as Ben, practically glowing with sincere affection and concern for the quarrelsome oldsters. Livingstone is pleasingly sassy as the registered nurse, while Diane Evans is the perfect blond bombshell nurse in the vaudeville skit. In a tiny role, Michael Block is a strong presence as the harassed stage manager.

Under very capable director Dee Dwelley, "The Sunshine Boys" is warmhearted, nostalgic, gentle comedy.

The set for Clark's one-room apartment in an old hotel looks appropriately down-at-the-heels. The stage crew was noisy and slow at Saturday night's performance, and a missed lighting cue between scenes highlighted the awkwardness.

Barbara Michals teaches high school English and journalism in Southfield. A theater critic for the last 13 years, she is an inveterate playgoer who regularly catches up on all the New York productions.

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Anita Sarko of Detroit, who has been called queen of the DJs in New York, will return to her hometown to spin records for dancing at a benefit party called New York Lifestyles '87. She offers her Music Fantasy from the Big Apple's hottest club, the Palladium. Guests will gather at the event, to benefit the March of Dimes, Wednesday at Towne & Country Interiors in Bloomfield Hills. Jim Harper, host of WNIC's "The Breakfast Club," will be master of ceremonies.

DJ conquers Big Apple

By Chuck Moss
special writer

THE BACKDOP will be pure Big Apple when Town & Country Interiors in Bloomfield Hills holds its March of Dimes benefit Wednesday.

Furnishings, food and fashions will approximate New York. However, when Detroit native Anita Sarko hits the podium to spin the tunes, it won't be ersatz but mainline Manhattan. New York's queen of the disc jockeys? You're looking at her.

"I don't play to the crowd. People come to hear my taste. I'm not a juke box."

Now that's attitude! Hardly less daunting is her answering machine: "At the sound of the beep, tell me why I should want to talk to you." Whew!

But once on the line, Sarko is fluent, engaging, down to earth and possessed of a — dare it be said? — Midwestern charm. She has been called everything from a celebrity DJ to "Our Lady of Perpetual Sound." An acknowledged celebrity in her own right, Sarko is the reigning empress of the New York club scene. That's a long way from Sher-

wood Forest and Mumford High

"CELEBRITY JUST means I was in the right place at the right time," she said.

A Michigan State University alum, Sarko left Detroit to attend law school in Georgia, got married, figured law was for the birds and answered an ad for a Georgia radio station. Within two weeks she was on the air. The time was the late '70s, and Sarko wowed the Southern airwaves with new sounds.

"Then I went up to New York for a visit. The B-52s — you're Georgia kids — said, 'You gotta stop by the Mudd Club.' I did, heard the DJ and told the manager I could do better, and came up to the big city cold, figuring I'd get a job and a place."

She laughs, her trademark throaty chuckle. "I was so dumb I didn't know you just didn't do that."

Sarko started spinning for Mudd. Then, "When everyone got tired of Studio 54, they all came here. There I was, new in town, and suddenly I'm working the hottest club in New York. Now is that timing?"

Sarko doesn't content herself with spinning club platitudes. She has co-hosted the No Entendies avant-

garde cabaret, which gave Madonna and the Beastie Boys their start ("The Beasties were my little 14-year-olds, hanging around the club. They're really wonderful kids"). Plus, she writes a music column for the newspaper NY Talk.

In addition, Sarko's fame in ambience engineering has led to worldwide demand for her talents.

"I do fashion shows, galleries. I was taken to Japan — Tokyo — and I put on a tour of clubs in Italy recently."

ALTHOUGH SARKO is startlingly nonchalant about her job, her voice soon grows determined.

"Basically, I'm a DJ. But my approach is not like others. I am not a juke box."

"I'd describe it as being mood-oriented, walking the line between self-indulgent and commercialist. But I need people to create a mood. I'll just walk in and start throwing things out. Some DJs will have their playlists all worked out in advance — not me. You have to be totally open to anything you feel from an audience. I look at clothing. I read the people."

She laughs again. "In eight years,

you learn it. But it depends what you see. If I get nothing back from the audience, I can give."

A typical Sarko night might feature big-band as well as avant-garde Motown and the latest New York edge sounds. She's planning to bring 100-200 records to the Town & Country show alone. Does she own all those records?

"That's like asking a plumber if he owns his wrench."

And how do you get to be a celebrity DJ?

"You become enough of a brat. Then she backpedals. 'I was in the right place, right time. I dress rather eccentrically — Victorian, Edwardian, big hats. They don't know what to make of me. New York has this open-arms attitude of show me. If you can strike the right chord, you're accepted."

What is the right chord? "It has to do with humor."

Anyone interested in hearing the Detroit native who conquered New York is welcome to hit the Town & Country Interiors benefit party for the March of Dimes. Tickets are \$35 per person, starting at 7 p.m. If there is New York Lifestyles '87.

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