

Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



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ART EMANUELE/staff photographer

John Neville, artistic director of Stratford Festival in Stratford, Ontario, is bringing a festival production to Detroit's Music Hall.

A 'dictator' at Stratford

By Ethel Simmons
staff writer

DESCRIBING THE WAY he carries out his function as artistic director of Canada's Stratford Festival, John Neville said emphatically, "I'm a dictator." Then, he qualified it — a benevolent one.

"You can't run a theater by committee," he pointed out.

Neville, actor, director, and artistic director of the internationally acclaimed festival since 1966, visited the Livonia office of the Observer & Eccentric on Monday. He told how he turned around the fortunes of the festival, which had gone heavily into debt and had dropped in quality of productions. The 1988 season, which ended recently, was "the best season in the

history of the theater's 36 years," he said.

Neville was in this area to talk about the festival's first production ever in Detroit, of Shakespeare's "The Two Gentlemen of Verona," opening Tuesday at the Music Hall Center.

The production, which was presented last season at Stratford's Avon Theatre, continues through Sunday, Nov. 27, at the Music Hall. For ticket information, call the box office at 963-7680.

THE ENGLISH-BORN Neville studied at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London during the late 1940s and starred on stage at the Old Vic in Shakespearean roles. He created the title role of "Alfie"

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King of Siam has appeal

By Victor E. Swanson
special writer

YOU, BRYNNER is not the only actor to be attracted to the role of the king in "The King and I."

Jerry Sima of Birmingham, an actor, director and teacher, has played the king three times in local theater productions, the first time in 1968 and the last time in 1981 for the Avon Players.

Sima will enthusiastically re-create the king again, beginning Friday, in the first of nine performances with the Players Guild of Dearborn.

For more than 30 years, Rodgers and Hammerstein's stage production "The King and I" has been thrilling theatergoers. The music is great, and the story, based on the novel "Anna and the King of Siam" by Margaret Landon, is a terrific stage story.

Late actor Brynner performed the king on stage for years and appeared in this role in a 1956 movie and in a 1972 television series called "Anna and the King."

"IT'S A PART that I have a real affinity with," Sima said, during an interview in the library of Andover High School in Bloomfield Township, where he is an English teacher. "I don't know why. I think there's a lot of kid in me, and the king is a kid."

"It's also an opportunity to play a completely different role from the way I see myself — step out of me for awhile and be somebody totally different."

Sima said the real king of 1860s Siam "was a barbarian, who whipped people and actually killed people . . . He was arrogant, pompous."

"I don't have those emotions in me, so to configure them up is really a challenge and exciting."

Since playing the role in 1968 or 1978 or even 1981, he has matured, and "in some ways, I feel more . . . psychologically and emotionally prepared now at age 50. I understand the king better."

This 1988 production of "The King and I" is the first time Sima has worked with the Players Guild of Dearborn, which Sima calls "one of



Sima stars once again as the king.

the three oldest community theaters in the State of Michigan."

"I got the part and was really, really pleased to have my first performance with that group. It's personally exciting to me. It's a very large membership — I don't know — hundreds of people in that group, like 600 membership."

THIS TIME, Sima is working with actress Jackie Bacus as Anna, the teacher. "Always, the Annas I've played with have been extraordinarily strong women, strong personalities."

He talked about some of the great moments with the actresses who have played Anna and the children who have played the king's children.

One of his fondest memories of rehearsing deals with a scene in which the king angrily orders the children out, with the line, "Out! Out! Out!"

Sima recalled he was trying to hold back laughter when one child came up to him one day and said, "Mr. King, you know, when you say that 'Out! Out! Out!' and you bowl at us, don't look at me. That really scares me." Sima asked the boy if he knew they were only play acting, and the boy answered, "I know, I know, but don't look at me."

For this production, Sima works with about 14 children. Working with



Here's how Jerry Sima, English teacher at Andover High School in Bloomfield Hills, looked as the King of Siam in a previous production of "The King and I."

children is what he really enjoys, which is why he teaches at Andover. He has taught courses there in English, acting, mime and stagecraft and has directed such stage productions as "My Fair Lady," "The Sound of Music," "Oliver!" and, of course, "The King and I."

"I love being here with the kids. I don't feel any difference in my enthusiasm, my excitement for learning or for teaching as I did in 1959

when I began. I can't wait to get here in the morning."

SIMA ARRIVES for school at about 7:15 a.m. and goes and goes all day. After school he's still going.

"I tutor after school. I get kids prepared for ACTs and SATs. I work with them on composition and get

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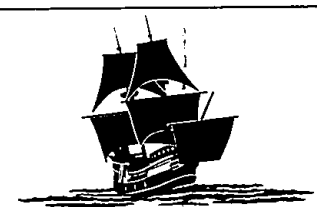
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