

# Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



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(O7C)

## Youtheatre for all

### Kids, parents, volunteers, seniors enjoy it

By Cathie Breidenbach  
special writer

**K**IDS AREN'T the only people who love the musicals, biographical dramas, international entertainment and puppet shows produced by the Detroit Youtheatre at the Detroit Institute of Arts.

A total of 410,000 young people last year saw Youtheatre shows. No body is surprised when preschoolers whose feet can't touch the floor and first graders missing one or another of their teeth love the shows, or when their older brothers and sisters applaud with enthusiasm. The surprise comes with the number of adults who count themselves fans of the Detroit Youtheatre.

Some grownups bring children as cover for their secret relapses into the whimsical enthusiasms of childhood. Some volunteer with the Friends of the Detroit Youtheatre and get to see the shows as a perk that comes with volunteering. Others abandon all pretext and buy tickets just for themselves.

Detroit Youtheatre curator Mickey Miners says senior citizens particularly like the shows and their attendance increases yearly as word gets around about the live, professional performances at one of the best prices in town. The most expensive tickets for Youtheatre productions cost

\$5. Most are \$4.

He says seniors, especially those on fixed incomes, appreciate the affordable tickets, and they like the fact that Youtheatre productions are during the day. Shows run an hour to an hour and a half, designed to please wiggly youngsters who can't sit still long.

**REASONABLE-LENGTH** shows also please older folks who find sitting for long periods difficult for entirely different reasons than those of the younger crowd. Miners feels strongly that entertainment for young people should not be the condescending "kiddle" variety. "We don't insult the intelligence of the audience," he says, so shows that mesmerize 5-year-olds also please adults.

Many adults start coming with their children and decide to support the Youtheatre by volunteering regularly, with 63 members of the Friends of the Detroit Youtheatre.

Diane Wahl, who chairs the Friends, says the group welcomes new volunteers and invites those interested to leave their names with the Youtheatre Ticket Office, 832-2731. She has been a member of Friends for 15 years.

"I love it," she says. "It's not only nice for me, but my children have benefited." The Friends are divided into groups according to the day of

the week volunteers work. There's a group for Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, two for Saturday, as well as a group that runs the Lobby Shop where children can buy gifts and souvenirs priced from 25 cents to \$10.

Wahl says, "With more mothers in the work force, it's more and more difficult to find weekday volunteers. The majority of our volunteers during the week are senior citizens." Many working mothers find Saturdays an ideal time to do volunteer work without guilt because their children come with them to enjoy the show and the outing with Mom.

**WHAT DO** Detroit Youtheatre volunteers do? Those who work weekdays greet busloads of schoolchildren when they pull up at the DIA door. They guide classes to their assigned seats in the auditorium and keep an eye on students during the show. Afterwards they dismiss classes row by row and make certain stragglers don't miss their buses.

Besides ushering, volunteers also prepare and serve a hot pot-luck lunch for players. Cast members don't have time to take off their makeup and costumes to go out for a sandwich between the morning and matinee shows, so volunteers provide a homemade lunch. Casseroles, big pots of soup, nut breads and giant salads satisfy the appetites of cast members hungry for home cooking because they're so often on the road. On Saturdays, volunteers serve lunch to the cast and to the Wayne State University students who usher for performances.

The Lobby Shop group uses proceeds of the non-profit shop to buy Youtheatre tickets each year for 200-300 underprivileged and handicapped children. Lobby Shop volunteers arrive an hour before curtain time to arrange merchandise in the shop, which opens one half hour before show time and remains open a half hour after the show.

Vickie Rubin of West Bloomfield discovered the Youtheatre when her daughter's nursery school came downtown for a show. "I couldn't believe how terrific it was," she recalls. For the last year she has volunteered in the Lobby Shop. Almost every Saturday, except when chicken pox intervened, she comes downtown with her son, Scott, who's almost 6, and her eight-year-old daughter, Stephanie.

She works the Lobby Shop, catches the show with her children, and they get the thrill of having lunch with the players dressed in full costume. Afterward they roam the art museum. Rubin says, "I'm having a ball. The Youtheatre came at a perfect



Ten performances of the Prince Street Players will be presented Tuesday-Saturday, Dec. 27-musical production of "Alice in Wonderland" 31, at the Detroit Institute of Arts' Youtheatre.

time in my life. I was looking for something."

**A YEAR AGO** Georgia Locoy of Birmingham signed up as a volunteer with Friends of the Detroit Youtheatre because she wanted to put in some worthy service time and because she admits she was looking for a grownup way to legitimately indulge her craving for childhood pleasures. "It feeds the little kid inside me and gives me a real people experience," she says of working with the Friends.

Locoy's children are teenagers now, and the former nursery-school teacher no longer had a class of children to shepherd to the theater. For the last year she has worked a schedule which averages about one Friday

a month during the fall, winter and spring when the Youtheatre stage shows.

Locoy chairs the Friday group of volunteers and says her group particularly needs more helpers. She delights in watching children's reactions to the shows. "For some kids coming to the Youtheatre is the first time they've seen live theater and the first time they've been in Detroit," she says.

She is enthusiastic about exposing children to theater and to the exciting resources in the city — resources like the DIA. "I get real concerned when I hear people from the suburbs talk about being afraid to come downtown. There's some danger any-

where, but I'm not going to let life go by me while I sit in my house." Most volunteers park in the nearby Detroit Science Center lot and say they feel completely safe walking around the Cultural Center.

Elizabeth Donohue Colvin of Southfield, treasurer and membership chair for Friends, began volunteering 15 years ago when her son was 4. Early exposure to theater made an impression on him, and at 18, "He's in all the school plays." She speaks highly of the lasting friendships she has made. "There's a core of people who've stayed in through the years. We've watched each other's kids be born and grow up. It's a slice of life."



"Breakfast With Santa" continues through Friday, Dec. 23, at the DIA's Kresge Court Cafe. Santa, Alice and helpers from Wonderland will visit each table.

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