

# Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



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(O&amp;E)

## Good company

### Talents from near and far study in unique program

By Cathie Bredendach  
special writer

**UNIQUE** MAY BE an overused word in our hyperbole-happy society, but the Hilberry Theatre, now in its 25th season, deserves the adjective.

Because the Hilberry offers a unique program, it draws members from across the country. Some, like Anita Barone who grew up in Birmingham, Todd Barker of Plymouth and Andree Chipp of Westland, were lucky enough to find what they wanted on home turf.

Ask the 44 members of the repertory company why they joined, and sandwiched between praises for the Hilberry, members invariably mention that almost nowhere else in the country can they combine the invaluable experience of working in a repertory company with a program that also grants a master of fine arts or doctorate degree.

The Hilberry Theatre, a graduate-level program of Wayne State University in Detroit, presents plays five days a week from October through May. Each season it produces seven plays, which run three at a time in rotating repertory.

**FEBRUARY'S PRODUCTIONS** include Shakespeare's tragic love story, "Romeo and Juliet," "Wild Honey," a comedy based on Anton Chekov's rambling epic; and the dosing adventure "The Scarlet Pimpernel," set during the French Revolution. For tickets and schedules of current and upcoming productions, call 577-2572.

Anita Barone, who plays Juliet in the current production of Shakespeare's tragedy, went to high school in Birmingham and earned her bachelor of fine arts at the University of Detroit before joining the Hilberry. She had "slews of responses" to her auditions and looked at companies across the country, but none of them offered the unique combination of repertory and a degree.

She says, "I didn't join specifically for the degree. I wanted to get repertory experience, play to full houses and work with older actors." Her professors from the University of Detroit swayed her decision to join the Hilberry because many of them are enthusiastic Hilberry graduates.

To develop her current role as Juliet, Barone says she used her own experience. Juliet is 14 in the play, and Barone says, "I remember being 14. I was impatient. I wanted everything now."

Barone also was 14 when she first saw the Zeffirelli film version of "Romeo and Juliet." She says, "I remember holding hands through the whole movie with Randy." She draws on such memories to recreate Juliet's youthful passion.

**PLAYING JULIET** may consume her attention on one night, but the next night she must switch gears for her small role in "Wild Honey" and then shift again to work as stage crew and move furniture in "The Scarlet Pimpernel." Experience in all aspects of theater and with a variety of roles challenges members of a repertory company.

Barone says, "Repertory forces you to do a number of things. You have to make roles different. You're forced to find the contrast and play the difference."

Barone will complete her three-year program this spring and plans to spend the summer with the Colorado Snow Mass/Aspen Repertory Theatre. Then the coast calls — Los Angeles, the mecca of film. "I'll be so close," Barone says, "I might as well check it out."

Besides an impressive list of roles, including Helen Keller in the Attic Theatre's "Monday After the Miracle" and Agnes in "Agnès of God," Barone also had a part in the locally filmed movie, "The Rosary Murders." She says her overriding objective is, "To be a working actor," and she includes film, television and radio as potential ways to make a living using her considerable skills.

Also a member of the 1988-89 Hilberry Company is Andree Chipp of Westland. She could not be reached for comment.

**ALTHOUGH TODD BARKER** was often behind the footlights during his years at Plymouth High School, at the Hilberry he is a stage manager and director. The stage manager manages split-second timing as he gives cues to lighting and sound technicians and to stagehands during each performance, and he keeps records of all script changes and blocking patterns in case someone has to step into a role at the last minute.

Before joining the Hilberry company last year as a doctoral candidate, Barker earned a master of arts from Eastern Michigan University in oral interpretation and worked in theater in New York and California. He developed and performed a program designed to broaden student awareness of AIDS, and he continues to study the way performance interacts with society.

He delights in people's reactions when they hear that he served, ironically, as a dresser in the Broadway "musical" "Oh, Calcutta!" Barker's theater credits also include works as a costume designer and scenic artist.

He says of the repertory schedule, "I've never done theater at this pace. If we're not in performance, we're in rehearsal." Because he is intrigued by oral histories, he looks forward with particular enthusiasm to the Hilberry's spring production of "Working," a play adapted from Studs Terkel's book of the colorful stories Americans tell about their work lives.

Margaret Spear, promotion director for the theatre, says the Hilberry chooses plays that will be good experience for the company. "If you can do classics, you can do most anything," she says of the Hilberry's tradition of providing its education program in the time-tested plays of great theater.



Todd Barker of Plymouth is a stage manager and director with the Hilberry Company.



Anita Barone of Birmingham is Juliet in the Hilberry Repertory Theatre's current production of "Romeo and Juliet."

**EVERY SEASON** the company also features a few outstanding modern works. The Hilberry chooses plays aimed to please audiences, but it doesn't shy away from controversy. Spear says, "If you can get the audience arguing out in the lobby, you know you have a stimulating show."

Applicants to the Hilberry go through a strenuous selection process which includes auditions held in Los Angeles, New York, Detroit, Chicago and Atlanta, by the University Resident Theatre Association. Hilberry members are all graduate students in Wayne State's three-year master of fine arts program, and a few are working toward doctorate degrees. Spear says current compa-

ny members come from 15 states as well as Canada and Mexico, and they hold 52 degrees from 34 different colleges and universities.

Most college and university productions must contend with an overabundance of players just out of adolescence. The Hilberry is different. Nearly all Hilberry members sport "blos" sprinkled with credits from top regional and university theaters, from summer stock, off-Broadway productions, or from film. They're not star-struck whippersnappers banking on chutzpah and high hopes, but people who bring to the company a broad range of theatrical experiences.

Many already belong to Equity Actors Association, the Screen Ac-

tors Guild and sundry professional organizations. Their seasoning and the fact that many are older than the average graduate student enriches the Hilberry's productions.

Members of the Hilberry Company work long, hard hours. Spear explains how strenuous the program is. "Six days a week, they're busy going to classes and working on matinees and evening performances — too busy to work outside," so each Hilberry member is given a fellowship and receives a graduate stipend. Of the company's 44 members, only 17 belong to the acting company. Others create sets and costumes, act as stage managers, design lighting and sound, or manage the business end of the theater.

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