

# New theater accents deaf

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WHEN PEOPLE learn that Wells' parents are deaf, they often say sympathetically, "Oh, how sad." Wells feels no sadness about her growing up with deaf parents. "I feel my life has been enriched. They were good parents."

She insists, "Deafness isn't something to be fixed. The deaf are a group of people who share a language and a culture." She has shared that culture from birth, and the Sign Players, Unlimited, combines her lifelong commitment to the deaf community with her devotion to the art of theater.

She is currently earning her master's degree in fine arts at Eastern Michigan University. Last summer she worked with the National Theatre of the Deaf in Washington, D.C. Sign theatre, because it relies exclusively on vision as the communication mode, adds to the already myriad details a director must consider in staging a play. Wells decided to keep sets and costumes minimal for "The Ice Wolf," in part because a traveling troupe can't be encumbered by elaborate sets. Simple and portable sets are more practical.

But the most commanding reason for simplicity lies in the nature of sign theater. Wells says, "We have to

be careful that sets and costumes focus on the people and the story and don't distract from the signs." In hearing theater, actors may upstage one another (block one another from audience view) by accident or out of competitive spite, but in sign theater keeping sight lines clear becomes not just wise directing but crucial to communication.

SIGN THEATER demands meticulous staging of the action to keep sight lines open every second. Wells says the nature of sign theater also limits the size of the house. "I prefer a small house. If people sit too far away, they can't see." She feels 300 to 350 is the maximum-size house suitable to sign theater.

Promoting Sign Players, Unlimited, differs from other theater advertising, according to Laurie Smalls. "In photographic sessions we accentuate the signing," she says.

Target audience for "The Ice Wolf" includes specialized schools for the deaf and organizations in the deaf community, as well as the general population. Both audiences are responding with enthusiasm for the unique, new theater. Smalls says, "We've been surprised by the positive response of churches, schools and community centers who say, 'That's really different. We'd like to see that.'"

# Strong images defined in show

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able. The ambivalence and hint of sorrow Kane injects into the song "Cabaret" runs throughout the Meadow Brook production, creating an intelligent tension to balance the naughty mindlessness of the song and dance acts at the Kit Kat Klub.

MICHAEL NOSTRAND as the able Master of Ceremonies seems more a sniggering little guy than a malevolent force, but he keeps the

tension between Innocence and evil in his portrayal of the androgynous, white-faced MC, the role made famous by Joel Grey.

Ironically, the show's most haunting melody and the piece that showcases the fine voices and harmonizing of the cast belongs to the Nazi anthem "Tomorrow Belongs to Me." Polished dance numbers, an excellent orchestra and cast, plus Carl Schurr's careful balance between bawdiness and emergent evil, make Meadow Brook Theatre's "Cabaret" intelligent, lively entertainment.

# Gordon Reinhart goes to L.A.

By Ariene Funke  
special writer

Gordon Reinhart often had sweaty palms and a nervous stomach when he performed on his violin.

But put him on a stage, playing theatrical roles, and he is at peace. "Acting seems so much easier for me," said Reinhart, who grew up in Westland and graduated from Wayne Memorial High School in 1979.

Reinhart has devoted his life to music, debate and dramatics. He plays the lead role in the musical "Billy Bishop Goes to War," which runs through Sunday at the Attic Theatre in Detroit.

Then Reinhart will pack up and move to Los Angeles, where he is seeking new opportunities in theater and films.

"I'm excited," he said. "I will be starting from scratch. I have been saving money, enough to last for a year."

His parents, Dean and Ruth Reinhart, live in Westland.

UNTIL FAIRLY recently, Reinhart's major creative outlet was music. He began studying violin in third grade, at Elliott Elementary School, in the Wayne-Westland school district. He took private music lessons.

He spent six summers at Interlochen music camp in Northern Michigan — three years as a camper and three years as a counselor. As he continued his music studies, he performed frequently before audiences. "That was very difficult," he recalled. "I had nerves and stage fright."

At Wayne Memorial, Reinhart remembers he was "on the periphery," interested in theater but not trying out for parts. He played in the orchestra and took up forensics, the study and practice of public debate.

He credits Adrienne Klemme, his forensics teacher, with helping him hone his skills in public speaking.

"We spent a lot of time working on concentration, visualizing and using the imagination," said Klemme, a Farmington Hills resident. "By being able to perform before audiences he developed some degree of sophistication."

KLEMMER, WHO also teaches drama and interpreters theater, remembers her former student as bright and dependable. Reinhart wrote some original music, which was used in one of the school productions.

"It never occurred to me that I would act," Reinhart said.

After graduating from high school Reinhart enrolled at DePauw University, in Indiana, where he majored in violin and took business courses.

"It was the idea of preparing you to go into arts administration but, of course, I didn't choose to do that."

While at DePauw, Reinhart auditioned for a student theatrical production and became hooked on acting. He subsequently obtained a master's degree in acting at West Virginia University.

Acting presents the opportunity to research and learn about a variety of characters and issues, he said.

"Billy Bishop Goes to War" is a one-character musical based loosely on the experiences of a Canadian flying ace during World War I.



Gordon Reinhart, star of "Billy Bishop Goes to War" at the Attic Theatre, is planning a move to Los Angeles soon.

Reinhart, in a physically demanding role, spins stories in an officers' club. He even has the chance to play the violin.

"Billy Bishop was a very unlikely hero, and that is the charm of it," he said. "He was a rough-and-tumble kind of guy."

REINHART HAS directed and acted in several Shakespearean productions at the Attic. He also appeared in a play called "Burn This," which is about four characters attempting to cope with the death of a friend.

The Attic, in Detroit's New Center area, often showcases offbeat and thought-provoking productions, according to Reinhart.

"They tend to take risks," he said.

Reinhart also has appeared in "Amadeus" and "Nicholas Nickleby" at the Hillberry Theatre at Wayne State University. He spent two summers as a teacher and artistic direc-

tor at Snowmass-Aspen Repertory Theater in Colorado.

He decided to move to Los Angeles because it offers a wider range of opportunities. He knows he faces great competition for a limited number of roles. He expects to come back occasionally for local appearances.

"You can't compare yourself with other people, and you can't be intimidated," he said. "I don't want to be cocky. I have gone to school and trained. I'm not just some person who says, 'I think I will try acting.' It's possible I won't get work, but I believe I will."

"Billy Bishop Goes to War" is at the Attic Theatre, Third Avenue and W. Grand Boulevard, Detroit. Performances are at 8 tonight (Thursday) and Friday, 5 and 8 p.m. Saturday and 2 p.m. Sunday. For ticket information call 875-8284.

## upcoming things to do

- **AT DUFFY'S**  
Alexander Zonjic, jazz pop artist, performs with his quintet at Duffy's Waterfront Inn in Union Lake. Show time is 9 p.m. and 11 p.m. Cover charge is \$7 per person. Call 363-9469 for reservations.
- **PREVIEW PARTY**  
The third annual Jacobson's Holiday Preview Party to benefit the Meadow Brook Theatre at Oakland University will be 7-9:30 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 13, at Jacobson's at Great Oaks Mall in Rochester. Hors d'oeuvres and wine will be provided by Machus. The event is black-tie optional. Celebrity guests include Paula Blanchard, who will autograph copies of her new book, "Till Politics

Do Us Part," and Brian Polcyn, Pike Street Restaurant's chef, who will demonstrate his cooking talents.

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