

Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/953-2105



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Actresses enjoy 'Shoeman' roles

By Joseph S. Hoffman
special writer

TWO AREA WOMEN have gotten a foothold in Hollywood movie star Jeff Daniels' latest theater production called "Shoeman." Linda Parolini of Southfield was the shoeman for the part of Jennifer, the lawyer's secretary in the play. "It's a comedy about golf, shoes and infidelity," Parolini said. "When I came in to read the play before auditioning, I sat there and cracked up. It's a very funny play." Joanne McGee of Farmington Hills has put her best foot forward in the role of Jeana Hopkins the promiscuous "other woman" in the play. "The character I play feels no guilt," McGee said. "It's a fun role and a very entertaining play."

"Shoeman" is an original play written by Daniels. It is set in a small Michigan town like Chelsea, where Daniels grew up.

"THE GEMS of information I get from Jeff are absolutely invaluable," Parolini said. "I have a great admiration for the people I'm working for."

The cast has been rehearsing six nights a week in preparation for its opening night performance Friday at the Purple Rose Theatre in Chelsea.

"We have been rehearsing from 7-11 p.m. for over a month," Parolini said. "But people are so relaxed around here, making it all quite fun."

"We are here to serve a local public and provide an outlet for local talent," said the Purple Rose Theater Company's artistic director, T. Newell Kring. "By local, not only do I mean Chelsea but Detroit and its suburbs."

Just driving by, you might pass the theater thinking it was one of many small-town stores in Chelsea. But from the inside, the plush, purple, 96-seat theater is very typical of a 42nd Street off-Broadway theater in New York.

"I FIRST HEARD about the theater at an Equity liaison meeting. I was excited right from the start," said McGee, who has been into acting for many years.

On the other hand, Parolini is a bit newer to the whole world of theater. "I'm not a professional actress. I feel very lucky," she said. "When I first read about Jeff Daniels' new theater, getting a part in one of his plays was just a pipe dream for me, but here I am."

This is the Purple Rose Theater Company's second production since it first opened in January, and Daniels' first attempt at playwrighting.

"We want to start a theater that matters regionally and, with a little luck and patience, nationally. We want to support Michigan playwrights, actors, directors and designers and give them a place to show what they could do," Daniels said. "When you ask what's the purpose of this theater, that's it. That's what we're all about."

Daniels is best known for his roles in movies like "Terms of Endearment," "Arachnophobia," and "Purple Rose of Cairo," the movie he did with Woody Allen which inspired the name for his theater company.

"BEING THAT it is Jeff's play, he has put quite a bit of input in the play, not to override the director, but he has put in ideas as to which way to go with the character, and kind of how he saw the character when he wrote it," McGee said.

The new theater provides an opportunity for local audiences to see live theater, as well as gives local performers a chance to display their talent.

"I auditioned for Newell for their first production and didn't get cast in that but I came back, and the second time around I tried and landed a part," Parolini said.

The show runs through Sunday, June 2. Tickets are \$25 for opening night, \$15 for Friday-Saturday evenings and \$13 for Thursday and Sunday matinees. The theater at 137 Park St. is off I-94 at the 159 Chelsea exit. For more information call the box office at 475-5817.

Michigan production of the Cole Porter musical "Anything Goes" continues through Saturday, May 4, at the First Presbyterian Church. Last weekend's opening night performance was a success.

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Holmes' creator 1-man show looks at Conan Doyle

Daedalus Productions, in conjunction with Dame Jean Conan Doyle, presents "An Evening with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle" at 8 p.m. Friday, May 10, at a theater-in-the-round at the Birmingham Unitarian Church, 651 Woodward Avenue at Long Pine Road, Loren D. Estleman, author of "Whiskey River," "Sudden Country" and the Ann Walker mystery series, will be master of ceremonies. Tickets are \$10.

By Cathie Bredenbach
special writer

SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE was a spiritualist who believed in fairies and making contact with those in the Great Beyond. Yet ironically, Conan Doyle also created the great Sherlock Holmes, quintessential logician.

"Sherlock Holmes was a brain, a reasoning machine fueled by logic," says writer, actor and psychic investigator Mark McPherson who will present his one-man play "An Evening with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle" Friday, May 10, at the Birmingham Unitarian Church.

McPherson explains that after Conan Doyle lost a brother and son in World War I, his powerful sense of loss and yearning led to his belief in spiritual phenomena. In his later years, he spent a fortune, risked friendships and jeopardized his reputation to tour the world lecturing on spiritualism. Humor has it Conan Doyle was denied a peerage because the British found his late-in-life fascination with spiritualism to be embarrassing.

"Both Conan Doyle was a complex personality," says McPherson, and the show chronicles not only biographical facts but the tensions, ironies and contradictions in the life of the little-known writer who stood in the colossal shadow of his most famous fictional creation, Sherlock Holmes.

McPherson says the show "interweaves history with myth" to bring to life the Scottish physician-turned-writer. Seventy-nine years later, Dame Jean Conan Doyle, the youngest of Sir Arthur's five children, has befriended McPherson. When he interviewed her in London, she said the writer actor clearly resembles her father.

McPherson gets particular about their similarities. "We have the same shaped skull, both of us have one eyelid that sags more than the other, we have similar hairlines and our eye folds are even the same," Both Dame Jean and McPherson



Mark McPherson stars in an evening devoted to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who was as complex as Holmes himself.

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— Mark McPherson

also remark on the under-the-skin similarities between the 43-year-old McPherson and Conan Doyle, who died in 1930.

McPherson runs Daedalus Investigative Agency and he, like Conan Doyle, is fascinated by the Arthurian legends, psychic phenomena and the world's mysteries. He is affiliated with Scotland Yard and follows psychic investigations around the globe. McPherson's cases have taken him on nine expeditions to Loch Ness, Scotland, on excavations of the British "Camelot" site, and on conventions to discuss the Shroud of Turin.

Dame Jean says, "They would have gotten along well together, given their common interests."

In preparation for writing the play

in which he portrays Conan Doyle, McPherson read 14 biographies and created a voluminous book of notes to organize the threads running through Conan Doyle's life. He watched an interview filmed when Conan Doyle was 70, the year before he died, and did a Henry Higgins analysis of sounds and pauses in his speech.

THEN HE PRACTICED reading his script for Dame Jean so she could coach him on the nuances and cadences of Conan Doyle's distinctive speech patterns. McPherson says, "He was born in Edinburgh so there's an occasional trilling of an 'r' and Conan Doyle spoke with a unique emphasis in his cadence. With

the advice of Dame Jean, McPherson perfected his speech and mastered how Conan Doyle moved and held his pipe so audiences can experience what it would really be like to spend an evening with the complex, creative man.

Conan Doyle, whose name is seldom spoken without "Sir Arthur" as a prefix, received his knighthood, as many assume, for his world-renowned detective stories but for his acclaimed history on the Boer War which he wrote based on his experience heading a field hospital in South Africa.

McPherson brings to the stage little known truths about the modest, personally shy writer, who was a respected historian and a physician with a relatively unsuccessful London practice. Theory has it he created Sherlock Holmes out of boredom when his malingering medical practice brought in few patients.

During one phase of his life Conan Doyle aspired to be a politician but never managed to get elected. He studied medieval history and lived his life by a strict, chivalric code of honor. The Conan Doyle that McPherson brings to the stage was a man of ethics, imagination and vision.

upcoming things to do

● **'SOUTH PACIFIC'**
Final production of the Birmingham Theatre's current season is the musical classic "South Pacific" by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II. It begins a five-week engagement Tuesday, May 14, and continues through Sunday, June 16. Tickets are available at the box office, 614-2532, and at all ticket-master outlets.

● **'ANYTHING GOES'**
The First Theatre Guild of Birmingham production of the Cole Porter musical "Anything Goes" continues through Saturday, May 4, at the First Presbyterian Church. Last weekend's opening night performance was a success.

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