

Les Miserables' star performs at benefit

William Coultant
Staff Writer

Joe Kolinski has come a long way, from Redford Catholic Central High School to Broadway. Now he's coming back.

The star of "Les Miserables" in New York, Kolinski will be the featured performer at a benefit concert at Mercy High School in Farmington Hills. The "Celebrating The Arts" concert is scheduled for Dec. 8 at 3 p.m. and will honor former art teacher Sister Mary Ignatius Denay and music teacher and conductor Michael "Mr. B." Blazitsky.

"A couple of years ago my former voice coach Larry Teevens said I should come back if I got the chance to perform," Kolinski said. "I did and was a lot of fun. So I wanted to do it again."

THE CONCERT will raise money for the school's performing and fine arts programs at Mercy. The program will feature works by artists from Vivid to Bach. The school's concert choir, dance company, the Mercysaires and the orchestra, conducted by "Mr. B." and Livonia Symphony Conductor Francesco Di Biasi will perform along with Kolinski.

"Honoring two of the Mercy's 'institutions' will be worth it for Kolinski, who is taking time off from "Les Miz" to return, perform, and spend a little time with family in Birmingham before returning to New York."

Although Kolinski will perform

what he considers a difficult piece, Benjamin Britten's "Rejoice in the Lamb," he's looking forward to a break in the action.

"I'm the only original cast member left (after a five-year Broadway run of "Les Miz)," he said. "I get a week off every six months and three personal days a year."

But Kolinski isn't complaining about the work. He's enjoyed success in productions of "A Christmas Carol," "West Side Story," "Brigadoon" and others, but work was never that steady until he began performing in "Les Miz."

"This was virgin territory for me," he said. "The longest thing I'd been in had been 20 weeks, from rehearsal to the final night."

And after about eight years of "living hand to mouth" and working odd jobs to keep afloat, the long-running hit was welcome. But being a part of a successful musical has been a challenge at times as well, he said.

"After I'd done 'Les Miz' for about a year and a half I was really tired," Kolinski said. "Then I changed roles. I've found that if you go out every night and realize that this is the first time that audience has seen it, if you work to improve the character, it does work."

THE CHANCE to return with his wife, formerly Allison Lewendowski, to performing a difficult work in front of family and friends was something Kolinski could not resist. The night also will be special to the actor and his wife for another reason.

Musician strikes a chord with students

As a young man, in order to avoid captivity, he walked through Siberia with his most important treasure and companion — his violin.

He survived, spending years in Manchuria as a conductor before arriving in the country that would become his permanent home, the United States.

Michael "Misha" Blazitsky, "who will admit to being 90," is being honored for his commitment to Mercy

son. It will be their first wedding anniversary. Both Kolinski and his wife had studied with Teevens before leaving for New York. They only realized how much they had in common after they met in the Big Apple.

Why would Kolinski, a DCD graduate, perform at the all-girls school in Farmington Hills? Mercy gave him his first opportunities to perform. Those first amateur performances led to others in the Detroit area. Eventually, his talents paid off in the form of a scholarship to the University of Detroit.

For Teevens, who has taught at Mercy for 31 years, seeing a former student succeed is "a thrill," especially considering what it takes to become a success on Broadway. And having been a successful performer before settling down to a teaching career and family, Teevens knows what it takes.

Year's Eve celebration in Shain Park are \$5.

They will be available beginning Nov. 29 at the Birmingham Community House, Birmingham & Bloomfield Kroger stores, Birmingham locations of Fidelity Bank & Michigan National Bank, Crowleys, Tavern on 13, Deli Unique & Morels, both on Telegraph.

Buttons are \$7 if purchased on New Year's Eve.

High School, to music and to the arts.

Mr. "B" received his bachelor's and master's degrees in music from Wayne State University and taught music theory and conducted the school's symphony orchestra and chamber groups for more than 25 years. In 1971, he joined the music department at Mercy.

His former students include: James Waring, Roy Benson and Joseph Stajipin of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra; Joyce Teevagan, concert master of the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra; Edie Haladoff, violinist with the Los Angeles Symphony Orchestra and Miye Ourzouhian, first viola with the Metropolitan Opera.

Blazitsky will be honored at the "Celebration of the Arts" benefit concert at 3 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 8, at the Mercy High School auditorium in Farmington Hills.

On Sunday, Dec. 8, she will be honored by friends and students for her years of commitment to the school, for those she has inspired and challenged.

In 1978, Scholastic Magazine Inc.

Tickets for "Celebration of the Arts" are \$25 for the concert only. Sponsored tickets, ranging from \$150 to \$1,000 are available, and include the concert and reception, and a dinner at the Mercy Center.

The concert is at 3 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 8 in the Mercy High School auditorium, 29300 11 Mile Road, Farmington Hills. For further information, call Johanna Monaghan at 476-8922.



Joe Kolinski, a Redford Catholic Central grad, will return to the school where he began his acting and singing career.

Teacher shaped art department

Sister Mary Ignatius Denay, a Mercy nun for well over 40 of her 84 years, is responsible for the creation of the art department of Mercy High School, a department she shaped and nourished for 30 years from 1949-1979.

Her mosaics can be found in local churches, at Mercy High School and at the Mercy Center. At St Mary's Hospital in Grand Rapids, a series of her mosaics, based on the eight beatitudes, hang on the walls.

of New York honored Sister Mary Ignatius as the only teacher whose students had won Blue Ribbons and Hallmark Awards in consecutive years. Many of her students have gone on to careers in art.

First Night button sales begin Nov. 29

Buttons for First Night in Birmingham, a New Year's Eve celebration of the arts, go on sale Nov. 29.

"This evening provides singers, performers, dancers and other artists an opportunity to work, to be noticed, and to expand their craft," said Nancy Nelson, event co-chairwoman.

Held on New Year's Eve at different sites throughout Birmingham, First Night offers dozens of performances in a number of different artistic spheres.

Sponsored by corporate and private donations, First Night/Birmingham is a non-profit project of the Cultural Council of Birmingham/Bloomfield.

Three popular acts headline this year's event — the Chenille Sisters, the Prism Quartet and Jimmy "Spoon Man" Krews.

The Chenille Sisters, a nationally known vocal trio, weave tight harmonies and wacky humor into a musical evening. Prism Quartet's saxophones and electronic wind instrument draw jazz and contemporary sounds into its chamber music repertoire.

Krews turns the traditional art form of spoon playing into a captivating comedy performance.

First Night/Birmingham also includes, dance, mini-musicals, and hands-on fun for children. Buttons for entrance to all First Night entertainment, including a midnight New

Nutcracker performance set

Michigan Ballet Theatre presents the 25th anniversary production of the holiday classic ballet, "The Nutcracker Ballet," 7 p.m. Friday, Dec. 6, 1:30 and 8:30 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 7, and 1:30 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 8, at West Bloomfield High School with the Birmingham-Bloomfield Symphony Orchestra.

This gala production features a cast of over 110 dancers, actors and acrobats.

They will be performing at South Lyon High School with the Birmingham-Bloomfield Symphony Orchestra, 7:30 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 14 and 2 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 15.

Tickets \$5 to \$12 for information on West Bloomfield performance, call 624-5590. For information on the performance in South Lyon, call 624-5580 or 437-8165.

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