

First-class performances in 'Chicago'

Performances of the Birmingham Village Players production of "Chicago," continue through Dec. 7 at the playhouse, on the corner of Hunter and Chestnut, south of Maple in Birmingham. For ticket information call the box office at 644-2075 any time. There will be a Sunday brunch/matinee 12:30 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 1. Tickets are available at the door, but reservations are recommended.

Capturing the wild decadence of the Roaring '20s, the Birmingham Village Players present a wonderful production of the jazz musical "Chicago" that features first-class performances and exceptionally good choreography.

Thanks to the wacky journalistic style of the day, and a public that



Barbara Michals

thrived on sensational murder cases, murderers in Chicago became instant celebrities earning fame and fortune, and usually, their freedom.

Having just murdered her lover, adulteress Roxie Hart (Vickie Gasko) learns the ropes from her fellow prison inmate Velma Kelly (Lelsa Pulido), her matron (Maureen Cook), and her flamboyant lawyer Billy Flynn (Brent D. Billock). Each time she thinks she can beat the system and go it alone, she is humbled by

the fickleness of the press and public.

Along the way, there are snappy Kander and Ebb tunes and jazz dancing in the distinctive style of Bob Fosse (who also co-authored the book with Ebb).

As Roxie, Gasko is a perfect "dozy with moxy." She's tough, resilient and delightfully exuberant. She belts out tunes like "Funny Honey," "Roxie" and "Me and My Baby." Looking like a rag doll on her lawyer's knee,

she does a very humorous rendition of "We Both Reached for the Gun."

Pulido is outstanding as Velma, Roxie's rival for the public's attention. Outwardly tough but really vulnerable, she pouts like a winsome Kewpie doll. Pulido handles the dance numbers with great spirit and poise, leading the company in "All That Jazz," "Cell Block Tango," and "When Velma Takes the Stand," plus performing the knock-out solo "I Can't Do It Alone."

Billock is very believable as the slick and oily Flynn. His pleasant voice works well in "All I Care About," an honest self-appraisal, and "Razze Dazze," a sardonic look at the justice system.

As the matron, Cook is appropriately hard-boiled, extolling the bribe system in "When You're Good to Mama" and joining Velma in lamenting the loss of "Class."

P.J. Waterman is hilarious as Mary Sunshine, the city's leading "sob sister" journalist, who adds an exaggerated, but very pleasant soprano to the chorus of reporters.

John Picha is very likeable as Amos, Roxie's hopelessly glib husband. His "Mister Cellophane," however, doesn't stir enough pathos, partly because he's overwhelmed by the orchestra.

All of the supporting dancers are very good, and choreographer Dee Dee John-Charlton has done a fine



Vickie Gasko as Roxie Hart and Brent D. Billock as Billy Flynn in the Birmingham Village Players production of Fred Ebb and Bob Fosse's musical "Chicago."

job of adapting the large scale production numbers to the confines of the Village Player's stage.

Director Michael Gravame keeps the show lively throughout, and the nine-piece orchestra, under musical director Joan Bowes mostly sounds first-rate. The sparkling costumes fairly compensate for the dowdy sets, the production's only real weakness.

Barbara Michals is a retired Southfield English teacher. A theater critic for the last 17 years, she is an inveterate playgoer who regularly catches up on all the New York productions.

upcoming things to do

Deadline for the Upcoming entertainment calendar is three weeks ahead of publication. Send items to be considered for publication to: Kelly Wygonik, Entertainment Editor, the Observer & Eccentric, 36251 Schoolcraft Road, Livonia 48150.

TIN WHISTLE COFFEE HOUSE

The Paint Creek Folklore Society will hold its Tin Whistle Coffee House 7:30-10:30 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 30 in Fellowship Hall of the University Presbyterian Church, 1385 S. Adams Road in Rochester Hills. Performing groups will include "Second Opinion" from Lansing, and "Division Street" from the greater Detroit metro area. In addition, several members of Paint Creek will perform. Tickets are \$6 and available from any Paint Creek Society member or at the door. For information, call 552-0817 or 422-1925.

MIKADO

Michigan Opera Theater will host a family-oriented performance of "The Mikado" 2 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 30 at the Fisher Theatre in Detroit. Children's tickets \$10, only valid at the MOT ticket services office, 6519 Second. Call 874-SING for information. A party with activities for children will take place at the Fisher 1:15 p.m. Nov. 30.

MEADOW BROOK THEATRE

Meadow Brook Theatre presents "A Christmas Carol" Nov. 29 through Dec. 29 at the theater on the campus of Oakland University in Rochester Hills. For tickets, call 377-3300.

"A CHRISTMAS CAROL"

The Farmington Unitarian-Universalist Church will present the Parlor Players in "A Christmas Carol" 7 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 1 at the church, 25301 Halsted Road, Farmington Hills. Tickets \$7 adults, chil-

dren 12 and over, seniors \$5, children under 12, free. Call 478-7272 weekdays for information.

AVON PLAYERS

Avon Players of Rochester an-

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