

# Entertainment

Keely Wygonik editor/953-2105



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## Guild offers creative outlet

By Keely Wygonik  
staff writer

In light of recent plant closings and layoffs, the Observer & Eccentric will take a closer look at community theater groups like St. Dunstan's that were formed during the Depression and continue to prosper.

Like a family that weathers ups and downs, St. Dunstan's Guild of Cranbrook has endured for 60 years. Started in 1932 by a group of young people looking for an affordable creative outlet during the bottom of the Depression, the guild is still a good place to meet people who share similar interests.

Some, not familiar with Cranbrook, might think St. Dunstan's is a church group. It's not.

"St. Dunstan is the patron saint of musicians," said Jerry McMechan, a member since 1947.

"In the beginning, the dues were \$1 a year. We used to have scavenger hunts, dinners, and put on plays. It was a wonderful way for people to get together, be creative, and fun during the Depression for a little money."

AFTER WORLD War II, the group broadened their focus and

opened plays to the public, but the guild remains a club.

Dues are \$80 a year, plus a \$150 initiation fee. Students and senior citizens pay less.

Members are also required to serve on committees like publicity, finance, photography, tickets, lights, sound, costume, makeup, set production, building, to help support the organization.

"You can be very involved in the guild without ever being on stage," said publicity chairman Topper Pennington who portrays, Bill in "On Golden Pond."

There are about 200 active members, who range in age from 13 to 80. "We have everything from an unemployed carpenter to the chairman of the board of a major corporation, and everything in between," said Pennington who is an advertising/marketing executive.

Besides putting on plays, the group hosts catered parties and other social events for members.

Tom Peterson met his wife Carla through the guild. He is directing "On Golden Pond" which opens 8 p.m. Friday, March 27, for a two weekend run at St. Dunstan's Pavilion, 400 Lone Pine Road between Lahser and Cranbrook Roads, Bloomfield Hills, call 644-0527, for tickets.

### Impact on the suburbs:

#### The shrinking Auto Industry

EVERY YEAR the guild presents four shows, including one at the outdoor Greek theater. Plays are chosen by the guild's play reading/casting committee. Generally, the plays presented appeal to a wide audience.

For McMechan, who moved to North Carolina after retiring, the chance to play the role of Norman Thayer Jr. in "On Golden Pond" was worth the trip. "I've played this role twice before, and I love it, this is a delightful play, and I'm very fond of this organization," he said.

Cindy Merrill, who plays Chelsea in "On Golden Pond," moved to the area from Cincinnati two years ago after her husband was transferred here. A recent guild member, she said "It's a nice way to meet people. The talent is immense; they are incredibly talented nice people. It becomes an extension of your family."

Pennington and his wife, Kappy, also moved to the Birmingham/Bloomfield area from Ohio as a result of a job transfer.

"My son's fifth grade teacher was a longtime member and told us about the guild," he said. "My wife joined first. When I saw her on stage I got the itch to get back on stage. I majored in drama in college and was in a lot of plays in high school and college."

"THIS GROUP aims to be as professional as possible. There's a high level of professionalism among the performers," said Lillian Hitchcock who plays opposite McMechan as his wife, Ethel. "We have very dedicated people here. We do shows that compare with Broadway theater."

David Hsu, associate curator at the Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum, "got bit by the theater bug in high school and college." He lives on the Cranbrook campus, and got active in the guild after participating in a show last summer.

"There's a sense of community, real pride, everyone is committed to the pursuit of excellence. I'm thrilled to be a part of this group," said Hsu who portrays Billy Hay in "On Golden Pond."

Peterson, who works as a picture framer, but dreams of college or producing video, said the guild is "a nice group of people to work with."



St. Dunstan's Theatre Guild members, Lillian Hitchcock, (Ethel) and Jerry McMechan, (Norman) in a scene from "On Golden Pond."

## Musical event features selections from popular shows

"Music in the Sanctuary" is the title of the upcoming musical event at Temple Beth El.

Scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Sunday, March 29, it will feature Cantor Gali Hirschenschlag, soprano, and tenor Ari Bachlund of the Metropolitan Opera. They will appear with the Michigan Opera Theatre, conducted by Mitchell Krieger.

The concert will feature selections from "Judas Macabaeus," "Carmina," "Phantom of the Opera," "West Side Story" and more.

HIRSCHENSCHLAG is among the first invested women cantors in this

country. She is among several gifted singers in this area who are adept at both the cantorial chant as well as the secular operatic repertoire.

In addition to concerts in this country, she has appeared in Canada, South Africa and Russia. She has performed with the Buffalo Philharmonic and the Birmingham Bloomfield Symphony Orchestra, and sang with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra in 1990.

Bachlund is an acclaimed Wagnerian tenor. He appeared with the Metropolitan Opera in "Parsifal," "Boris Godunov," "Das Rheingold" and "Romeo et Juliette."



Avigdor  
Zaromp

Among his scheduled operas this season are "Elektra," "Kaisa Kubanova" and "The Makropulos Affair." He has also appeared with major opera houses in Europe. Krieger, who is director of artistic resources at the MOT, has worked with the New York City Opera, and

the Cleveland and Santa Fe operas. He spent four years on the opera faculty at the University of Michigan. He has proved to be capable of juggling his conducting and administrative duties effectively.

Tickets are \$20 general admission, with senior citizen and student dis-

counts. Also, \$50 patron tickets and \$100 benefactor tickets are available. Call 851-1100 for information.

ANOTHER SPECIAL musical event will take place at 8 p.m. Tuesday, March 31, at Temple Israel. This event commemorates the 500th anniversary of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. Only recently has this expulsion order been officially rescinded.

The special work commissioned for the event is an oratorio, "Ever Since Babylon," written by Cantor Sam Adler with text by Cantor Rosenbaum, both from the East Coast.

In addition to tenor Harold Orbach, who is the cantor of Temple Israel, other singers will consist of baritone Richard Allen from Philadelphia, soprano Martha Warren from Boston, who is a Detroit native, and mezzo soprano Alice Hunter from the MOT.

The two narrators will be Evelyn Orbach, who is the director of the Jewish Ensemble Theater and Cantor Orbach's wife, and radio personality Paul Winter. (It is hoped his name will not bring more snow.) The Jackson Symphony and the Temple Israel Choir will complete this cast. Call 661-5700 for more information.

## Funny cast, dreamy set in Meadow Brook's 'Private Lives'

Performances of the Meadow Brook Theatre production of "Private Lives" continue through April 12 on the Oakland University campus in Rochester Hills. For ticket information, call the box office at 377-3300.



Mary Jane  
Doerr

By Mary Jane Doerr  
special writer

Shilly-shallying around is a great way to describe Meadow Brook Theatre's show "Private Lives," a 1930 satiric comedy about the lives of jet setters in the days before there were jets.

Noel Coward's English comedy is a replay of the Restoration comedy with some twists. A divorced couple meet on the balcony of their hotel rooms where they are honeymooning on their second marriage, a perfect scenario for Meadow Brook's cast to expound Coward's endless wit in elegant and shimmering costumes, and

a dreamy set.

A woman who runs off with her first husband while honeymooning with her second is not the kind of woman we admire. Sherry Skinner is the irascible Amanda and so natural and likeable, the artificial mask-like nature that typifies Coward's characters, melts away like chocolate with every believable, funny line she delivers.

ON DESIGNER Peter Hick's exquisite hotel balcony, when she is kissing her ex-husband while her husband is getting dressed for dinner, Skinner turns her head in an Art Deco-like fashion, lowers her voice, and says "What now?"

The answer to that question is why the play is so funny. In a moment of madness, she and lover Elyot take off for her Paris flat, leaving the spouses, waiting at the balustrade. Karen Sheridan as the French maid Louise summed it all up in beautiful French "Les idoles."

An ex-husband Elyot Chase, Carl Schurr's performance paces beside Skinner as his same color dressing gown deftly blends with the second act curtains, setting off Skinner's purple romper suit. He plays the piano beautifully. Skinner does a great Charleston.

The entire show is a perfect coordination of sets, costumes with classical balance and symmetry. In the

first act, two matching French doors fill the stone archway with red circles and lines. The second act is an artistic display of pinks and soft blues, more dramatic than Hick's surrealist "Cobb" set.

DIRECTOR TERENCE Kilburn

allows Schurr and Skinner to bat their lines back and forth like a baseball, but he artfully follows the classical balance of the set design and the symmetrical parallels in the play, to form scenes so beautifully laid out, each forms a picture of its own.

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