

ON THE
MARQUEE

Mystery dinner

It would be a crime to miss a murder mystery dinner sponsored by St. Philip's Episcopal Church of Rochester, 6:30 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 7, at the Long Branch Restaurant in Oxford. "A Five Year Reunion for the Class of 1954" will be the backdrop for this event. The \$50 per person cost includes cocktails, dinner, murder and mayhem. Fifty attire is optional. Tickets can be purchased at the St. Philip's church office, 100 Roman Street at Main Street in Rochester. The deadline for ticket sales is Oct. 27. Call 628-9382 or 651-6188 for information. All proceeds will benefit the St. Philip's Building Fund.

Salute to Italy

Enjoy Salute to Italy, a seven course fixed price dinner 7 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 29, at Marco's 32758 Grand River, (in the Village Commons) downtown Farmington. Cost is \$35, not including tax and gratuity, cash bar. Choice of five entrees, chicken breast with Michigan sun-dried cherries and Frangelico, Fillet Mignon Gorgonzola, Fillet of Dove Sole, Center-cut Provimi Veal Chop or spinach stuffed pork tenderloin with green peppercorn sauce. Reservations required by Oct. 19, call 477-7777.

Visiting orchestra

Luther College Symphony Orchestra will perform 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 27 at Farmington High School Auditorium, 32000 Shiawassee, Farmington. The orchestra is on a 10-day, six-state concert tour. The history of the 75-piece orchestra dates back to 1877. The concert is free and open to the public.

Meadow Brook

The Bill C. Davis comedy, "Mass Appeal" opens 8 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 29, at Meadow Brook Theatre on the campus of Oakland University in Rochester Hills for a four-week run. "Mass Appeal" deals with the conflict between a comfortably established older priest and the brash young seminarian who challenges the validity of his well-ordered world. For tickets, call 377-3300.

Farmington Players

Farmington Players opens its season 8 p.m. Friday, Oct. 30 with "California Suite" by Neil Simon at the player's barn, 32332 Twelve Mile Road, west of Orchard Lake Road. Shows, Oct. 30, Nov. 1, 6-8, 12-15, 19-21. Individual tickets \$8, season tickets \$23 for three shows — "California Suite," "Play On!" which opens Jan. 23, and "Anything Goes," opening April 30. For more information, call 553-2955.

Bloomfield Players

Bloomfield Players will present "Li'l Abner" 8 p.m. Friday, and Saturday, Nov. 6-7 and Nov. 13-14; 2 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 8 and Nov. 15 at the Lahser High School theater, 3456 Lahser Road, Bloomfield Hills. Adult tickets \$8, tickets for students and seniors (age 60 and over) are \$7. Tickets may be purchased in advance at the Bloomfield Hills Recreation Department, 4174 Dublin Drive, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday. Tickets will be available at the door for each performance.

Charming cast in warmhearted drama

Performances of the Jewish Ensemble Theatre production of "Today I Am A Fountain Pen" continue through Nov. 8 at the Aaron DeRoy Theatre at the Jewish Community Center in West Bloomfield. For tickets, call JET at 788-2900, visit any Ticketmaster outlet or call 645-6666.



CATHIE BREIDENBACH

"Today I Am A Fountain Pen," the first of Israel Horowitz's trilogy of plays set in Sault Saint Marie, Ontario, opens the Jewish Ensemble Theatre's season. The play recreates life in a garrulous, loving Jewish family in the early years of World War II when Jews worldwide felt horror at the happenings in Europe. Against this historical background, the Yanover family of the Soo wrestles with bigotry, hypocrisy, and the question of Jewish identity.

The warm-hearted production of "Fountain Pen," directed by Evelyn Orbach labors to overcome a convoluted, slow-moving plot and too-frequent scene changes. Orbach nearly succeeds in camouflaging the play's flaws by capitalizing on the abundant charm and warmth of the characters. In fact the play just escapes being too warm and too cute — but escape it does because the whole cast turns in unpretentious performances that exude genuine warmth. First prize for loveableness goes to Irving, the precocious 10-year son of Esther and Moses Yanover. Irving is a skinny, bespectacled kid who wears corduroy knickers with argyle socks. He's so quick he quips one-liners even stand-

ing on his head. Scott Lenter and Adam Rockkind share the role of Irving.

Second prize for loveableness goes to Ardenshensky, the impish 78-year-old narrator who also plays bit parts in the production. Last season, Sol Frieder played Ardenshensky in JET's production of "A Rosen by Any Other Name," the middle play in the Horowitz trilogy, and he returns to the plume role this season.

He debuts two new scenes Horowitz wrote especially for this production. Frieder is convincing as a courtly Yiddish gentleman whose jokes speak deep wisdom.

Frieder's German/Yiddish accent is the real thing, his gray beard doesn't come off after the performance, and he comes by his wise old gentleman look not with masterful makeup but by living 70 odd years. Frieder is utterly charming especially when he resolves the question of whether a Jew who keeps a kosher kitchen would still be a good Jew if he knowingly abson hits at a Chinese restaurant as the Yanovers did.

"Being Jewish is bigger than a pork chop," Ardenshensky pronounces with comic wit on the question of hypocrisy and Jewish identity.

Rochelle Rosenthal as Esther and Harry Carlson as Moses play Irving's parents who love to talk, bicker and spout one-liners almost as much as their son does.

Bigotry becomes an issue when the Yanover's Ukrainian hired girl, Annie, falls in love with Pete, an Italian hockey player. Annie's father despises Italians and forbids her to see Pete. Anna Trinkaous as Annie and William Coelius IV as Pete create believable chemistry as the young lovers



Heartwarming: Rochelle Rosenthal (left), Adam Rockkind, Anna Trinkaous and Harry Carlson in the Jewish Ensemble Theatre's season opener, "Today I Am A Fountain Pen."

who must meet on frozen park benches and talk of their love at the movies.

David Fox and Patricia Thompson portray Annie's parents, hardworking immigrants burdened by too many children and too little money.

Authenticity triumphs in the characters, sets and costumes of "Fountain Pen." Crocheted dollies under the old wooden radio in the Yanover's living room, Esther's klunky 1940s shoes and silver lame dress, and the voice of John Wayne on the tinny soundtrack at the movies all superbly

recreate time and place with the skill of set designer, Dan Vicary, and costume designer, Edith Leavis Boukstein.

Back in the winter of 1942, up in the Soo, the weather is bitterly cold and the chill of war hangs over the world, but in JET's production of "Today I Am A Fountain Pen," warmth unquestionably triumphs.

Cathie Breidenbach of West Bloomfield teaches college writing classes and works as a freelance writer.

'Forever Plaid' witty, great songs

"Forever Plaid" continues at Ferndale's Magic Bag Theater through Nov. 27. For ticket information, call 645-6666.

BY HUGH GALLAGHER
STAFF WRITER

You remember the joy groups, those close harmony Gue College types with the short hair, matching jackets or crew sweaters and voices that blended so smoothly they seemed Oritized.

"Forever Plaid" is an affectionate and hilarious send up of this 1950s musical format that works at two levels with equal success. It is a sparkling comedy that kids the guy group conventions and the "nifty, neat, keen" good guys of the era while at the same time honoring the music with fine close harmony arrangements.

The book on this bright and giddy musical is simply a clever hook on which to hang a cabaret presentation of witty comedy and great songs. It seems that one night in 1964 the as yet unheralded singing group Forever Plaid was on its way to its biggest gig yet at an airport hotel when their car was hit by a bus carrying a load of Catholic school girls to the Beatles

appearance on the Ed Sullivan Show, ah what symbolism.

The girls were all right but the Plaids died only to find themselves awaking in a theater 28 years later with a chance to give the concert they never gave.

The professional company at the Magic Bag offers cabaret theater at its finest in an appropriately intimate setting.

The four Plaids are each clearly differentiated through the evening and each played with zest by the outstanding cast. Bruce Blanchard is Smudge, the deep voiced member of the group who gets to let loose on "Rags to Riches." Jonathon Brody is the well named Sparky, a bundle of non-stop energy with a constantly mobile and expressive face. He leads lead on the mysterious "Perfidia."

Todd Heugheins is the shy, younger tenor Jinx, subject to nose bleeds and anxiety attacks who finally lets it all out in a Johnny Ray-like rendition of "Cry." Finally, the anchor of the group is the forever romantic Frankie (weren't all romantics named Frankie then) played with proper aplomb by Rick Meads.

He delivers a stirring tribute to harmony with deep sincerity. A nod also to the snooty piano player Kevin Cole who provides musical and comic accompaniment.

The show is continuously inventive. The group hails their personal hero Perry Como with twinkling stars and renditions of "Papa Loves Mambo" and "Catch a Falling Star."

They take a musical trip to the Caribbean with banana lights and a singalong. They even get modern with "She Loves You, yes shee bob." But the comedy reaches its apex with a three minute version of the Ed Sullivan Show that leaves nothing out. Finally, though, it is the pre-rock music that matters most. It was writer-director Stuart Ross' love for the music that inspired him.

Arranger James Raitt (Bonnie's cousin) honors the traditions even as Ross' choreography brightly exaggerates the dance routines. You remember those Four Freshmen, Four Aces, Four Lads hits "Moments to Remember," "No, Not Much," "Shangri-La," and that show stopper "Love is a Many Splendored Thing." It's all here and we're glad it is.



CRAG JULLEY

Forever Plaid: Jonathon Brody, (left to right), Todd Heugheins, Bruce Blanchard and Rick Meads star in Three Guys Productions' presentation of "Forever Plaid" at the Magic Bag Theatre Cafe in Ferndale.

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