THEATER

JET presents mystical comedy

Jewish Ensemble Theatre presents "36" by Norman Lessing in the Aaron Deroy Theatre, Jewish Community Center 6600 West Maple Road, West Bloomfield. Show opens for preview: 8 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 7; 8:45 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 9 and 2 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 10. Opening night 7 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 10. Continues through Oct. 1. Show times — 8 p.m. Wednesday-Thursday; 2 & 7 p.m. Sundays; 8:45 p.m. Saturdays. Tickets $11-$22. Call (810) 788-2900 or Ticketmaster (810) 645-6666.

BY KEELY WYGONIK
STAFF WRITER

Jewish Ensemble Theatre opens its 1995-96 season with Norman Lessing's mystical comedy "36."

"The playwright suggests each of us needs to have faith in something. It has nothing to do with logic. We just need faith," said JET artistic director Evelyn Orbach who is directing the show.

In "36" three Chassids (very traditional ultra-Orthodox Jews), with very different personalities, journey from Brooklyn to Cincinnati searching for one of the 36 great, just men who are known to roam the earth.

"God preserved the Earth because of these 36 righteous men," said Orbach. "When they find the guy who they believe is one of the 36, he turns out to be an electrician."

Broadway actor Sol Frieder portrays Nachman, the wise, old sage, and leader of the Chassidic trio. Robert Grossman, who most recently directed JET's production of "Golden Boy," is Mendel, hot-tempered, and bit of a curmudgeon. Daniel Kahn, who has appeared in four JET productions is Pitzik, unworldly, wide-eyed, thusting and very honest.

"It's fun," is how Orbach describes this play. Members in the cast agree.

"The play has a lot of contradictions and opposition — but it's all in good humor. I get the calling to search for one of the 36, and I bring along two sidekicks. It's a lot of fun. In the end, everyone is happy," said Frieder.

Grossman's character Mendel, could have been a veteran. He's had a rough time and is working hard to get a clearer vision of life.

"The story definitely parallels the Three Wise Men following the star," said Grossman. "But people need to know that this is a highly amusing play. There are a lot of laughs. It's quite whimsical. The specifics are meant to be taken light heartedly. The humor straddles Vaudeville and situation comedy."

For example, Kahn of Farmington Hills, who portays Pitzik, doesn't know what ping pong is. He doesn't know what a screwdriver is either.

"It is an interesting study of faith, Jewish culture and heritage," said Kahn. "It raises issues of faith, the Bible versus science, but there's a lot of good humor. I'm working with a terrific cast and director. Working with these people is a wonderful opportunity."

The cast also includes Robert Starko as Rabbi Manfred Dorfman, Jim Porterfield as Joe Walski and Cynthia Blaise as Mary.

Lessing has written over 300 TV dramas and a number of motion pictures, including "Bonanza."

Season schedule

■ **"The Diary of Anne Frank"** by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett. Previews Nov. 15 (opening night Sunday Nov. 19.) Continues to Dec. 21.

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize in 1956 when it premiered on Broadway. JET celebrates the 50th anniversary of the finding of this famous chronicle

■ **"Torch Song Trillogy"** by Harvey Fierstein. Previews Feb. 14, (opening night Sunday, Feb. 18). Continues to March 10.

Colorful comedic insight into the life of a nice Jewish boy *who happens to be gal.* Almost a musical, the audience gets a sense of his life, his love, his compassion and burning desire to make his Jewish mother understand.

■ **"Social Security"** by Andrew Bergman. Previews May 15 (opening night Sunday, May 19). Continues to June 9.

A yuppy couple and an aging parent, whose blossoming love life takes all by surprise. Lots of laughs and affirmation of the human spirit at any age.

■ **1996 Festival of New Plays in Staged Readings,** April 17-18, 24-25, May 1-2, 8-9.

Four manuscripts — not previously produced are selected from an arena of 100 playwrights from around the country. Each play is directed and acted by professional actors and open to discussion by the audience, playwright, cast and director. Each is presented for two performances. These are considered works in progress and playwrights have taken several of these to complete production, including two on JET's own stage.

■ 'The playwright suggests each of us needs to have faith in something. It has nothing to do with logic. We just need faith.'

— Evelyn Orbach

PREVIEW

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