

FRIDAY



Adrian Zmed stars with Sally Struthers and Mackenzie Phillips in "Grease" at the Fox Theatre, 2211 Woodward Ave., Detroit, (810) 433-1515.

SATURDAY



Dein Perry and the cast of "Dein Perry's Tap Dogs" bring industrial-strength tap to the Detroit Opera House, 1526 Broadway, Detroit, (810) 645-6666 or (313) 872-1000 for more information.

SUNDAY



Lee Murdoch presents a concert of Great Lakes Music & Lore 1 p.m. at Henry Ford Centennial Library, 16301 Michigan Ave., Dearborn to benefit the Dossin Great Lakes Museum. Admission \$5, call (313) 267-6440 or (313) 584-6100.



Hot fix: Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) begins his training to become a Jedi knight under the watchful eye of Yoda (performed by Frank Oz) in "The Empire Strikes Back Special Edition."

WHAT TO DO • WHERE TO GO

THE Observer
NEWSPAPERS

ENTERTAINMENT

KEELY WYGONIK, EDITOR • 313-953-2105

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 1997 • PAGE 1 SECTION E

KING OF comedy holds court at Townsend Hotel

BY KEELY WYGONIK
STAFF WRITER

There was little pomp, considering the circumstances. Jerry Lewis, one of the kings of comedy, was holding court for metro Detroit media Feb. 11 at the Townsend Hotel in Birmingham.

Casually dressed in a red shirt, navy V-neck sweater, jeans and jogging shoes, Lewis, who is starring as the devilish Mr. Applegate in "Damn Yankees" at Fisher Theatre, hardly looked like royalty.

"Isn't this cozy?" he asks as reporters, usually never at a loss for words, stare, overcome with emotion, and memories of their childhood hero. "It always starts out as a staring contest," he says. "This is number 54."

Finally, someone asks — "where do you get all the energy?" — the spell is broken, everyone remembers their lines, the show begins.

"I truly believe the body and mind atrophies. I fear that more than anything else. The more you do, the more you can do," said Lewis explaining why at age 70, 71 in March, he's starring as Mr. Applegate, the devil in the revival of the Richard Adler/Jerry Ross musical "Damn Yankees." He's also working on three new movies, all comedies, and will be 77 when he finishes them.

"We're born with a tremendous resource, the ability to get up and go. When I get up in the morning I open my eyes and scream. I made another one. I am moving as fast today as I did when I was 20, it prevents atrophy."

Lewis, who also said he's "gonna go to 101, and beat George Burns," is living a dream — to perform in a Broadway show. But why "Damn Yankees," I ask.

"The Yankees have always been a part of my life," he answers. "My father and I used to go to games together. In high school I was the only freshman playing senior baseball. I could have gotten a baseball scholarship."

Before agreeing to do the part, he went to see the show because "I didn't like the script. I went under duress, and came out loving the show."

Detroit Tiger fans, upset by the Tiger's recent losing streak, can certainly relate to Joe Boyd's frustration.

It's 1955, Boyd's favorite ball team is the Washington Senators, who never in all their history have had a chance to win a pennant. Boyd dreams of the Senators beating the New York Yankees to win the American League pennant.



STAFF PHOTO BY JERRY ZUKINSKY

Mischief devil: Jerry Lewis stars as Mr. Applegate in the first national tour of the Broadway music "Damn Yankees." Lewis discussed his devilish role at a press conference at the Townsend Hotel in Birmingham.

"Damn Yankees"

When: Continues through March 2.

Where: Fisher Theatre, 3011 W. Grand Boulevard (at Second) Detroit.

Show/ticket price: 8 p.m.

Wednesday, \$35; Thursday, 7:30 p.m. Sunday, 2 p.m. Saturday & Sunday, 8 p.m., \$47.50, \$40.50, \$30.50.

Friday and Saturday, Main Floor, \$35, \$32.50, \$25.

Buy one \$25. Available at all

Ticketmaster outlets. To charge tickets, (810) 645-6722. For information, (313) 872-1000.

and deception — there are songs including "You Gotta Have Heart," "Whatever Lola Wants," and "Two Lost Souls."

While Lewis plays a funny sort of devil, he's serious about theater. "This is a man who wants to do the best he can, and give the audience their money's worth," he said. "My father told me if you're not sweating, you're not working. Longevity comes from quality."

He demands that the show be every bit as good in Chicago, Boston and Detroit as it was on Broadway. "We bring Broadway to Detroit," he said. "I believe Detroit is as important as any other city."

He's a man with a point of view, integrity and sense of value. He started the National Tour of "Damn Yankees" after the Muscular Dystrophy Telethon '95, and the tour shut down early in August for six weeks so Lewis can prepare for the telethon. "Nothing stops MDA," he said. "Part of his contract for the show, allowed for time off to run on New Year's Eve 1999. I come back energized," he said.

Producing shows is expensive, and that's why Lewis believes there aren't more new productions.

"The theater needs material, but you have to give them their money's worth," he said. "We would shut theaters down if there weren't revivals or people passionate about their work. It was better in the 1940s and 1950s. There was more care, personal gratitude wasn't blotted out by cost."

A reporter asks why he hasn't chosen to do more "serious" dramatic roles. Lewis snaps, "you haven't seen my work."

"The world needs more of my nonsense than 35,000 people doing drama," he said. "Comedy is very difficult. It comes from a man in trouble who people will pay for making a complete fool of him. That's pretty dramatic. Don't talk to me about drama."

Lewis said he respects his profession, audience, and family — five sons, daughter, Danielle Sara who will be five in March, grandchildren, a great-grandchild, and wife SanDee "Sam."

"I use the treadmill every morning, I don't drink or smoke," he explains. "When you get to be my age you get wisdom. You count your blessings and take care of yourself. I have a strong responsibility."

When asked if the Jerry Lewis his daughter sees is the same one fans see, he replies — "I'm never off. My daughter sees her father, and the performer, but she doesn't understand why people stopped me at the mall and asked me for my autograph."

"Do they know you?" she asks? "I tell her 'no,' then she asks, 'can I have your autograph too?'

Rehearsing keeps him busy, and Lewis said he hasn't had much time to explore Birmingham or metro Detroit, but he did go to Somerset Collection in Troy with his daughter.

"Sam, my wife took her to FAO Schwarz at Somerset, and when I asked her where she wanted to go on our date she said we'd go to this swell mall. We pulled up in front, and there are all these walkways and elevators. She took me to elevator one in the bowels of this mall, and took me to FAO Schwarz where I bought her whatever she wanted."

COMEDY



Sing-Along: The cast of The Second City — Detroit (left to right) musical director Chad Krueger, Angela Shelton, Joshua Funk, Grant Krause, Rico Bruce Wade, Larry Campbell and Margaret Exner in the finale of "Ambassador Bridge Party," the ensemble's ninth revue.

CHRISTOPHER LARK/LARK & ASSOCIATES, INC.

Second City — Detroit parties, touches audience

BY KEELY WYGONIK
STAFF WRITER

The cast of Second City — Detroit "Reach Out and Touch," the audience in "Ambassador Bridge Party," the ensemble's ninth revue.

This is gritty, giddy, in your face comedy Motown style. When producer/artist/producer Angela Shelton says, "come on, I want you to 'Reach Out and Touch Someone,'" touch the person next to you," the audience gets nervous.

It's quite a sight, adults wiggling in their seats, looking up at the ceiling at their date, privately wishing this wasn't happening. Then the tension breaks, cast members rush into the audience and touch people. Rico Bruce Wade shows a picture of his children. The idea is — we're all different, but we're together, let's see what we have in common, and get to know one another, let's be kind.

"Touch" is what this ensemble

does a lot. They touch our buttons, our past, making us laugh, and challenging us to put aside prejudices against people who are black, fat, gay, or just different with lines like — "you don't like me because I'm white."

As in previous shows, the musical numbers are the strongest. Here's a favorite:

"If you're searching for a college to attend in the gorgeous state of Michigan . . . makes fun of our higher institutions of learning with familiar stereotypes. "Consider the playboy, party school, get a teaching degree from CMU. Get a University of Michigan degree in five or six years. Albion, expensive, not smartr."

Margaret Exner fits in well as the newest cast member. A graduate of Wayne State University, she has appeared in numerous productions at the Bonstelle and Studio theaters, was a member of The Second City — Detroit

"Ambassador Bridge Party"

When: The Second City — Detroit, 2301 Woodward Ave., Detroit.

Where: 8 p.m. Wednesdays through

Sundays, with additional shows 10:30

p.m. Fridays and Saturdays. The cast

performs an improvisational comedy set

(fee of charge) after every perfor-

mance on Sunday. Wednesdays and

Fridays, there are after show shows on

Fridays and Saturdays.

Tickets: \$12 Sundays and Wednesdays;

\$14 Thursdays; \$17.50 Fridays and

\$19.50 Saturdays. Call (313) 965-2222.

Touring Company, director and

M.C. of a local performance troupe

called "Popophobia Staging."

The world is unkind to people

like Margaret, who like fellow

cast members Larry Campbell and

Joshua Funk, is overweight.

This talented trio gets together

on Easter in the basement of a

house in suburbia where Uncle

Josh and Uncle Larry are playing

pool. Margaret is kicked out of

the kitchen by her mother, and sent away. She's upset about being fat. The uncles try to make her feel better by trying to name some really famous people who are fat, and telling her it's the person inside that counts. But Uncle Josh's "butt crack" was a little sophomoric.

Detroit Mayor Dennis Archer (Rico Bruce Wade) and Gov. John Engler (Joshua Funk) are fair game when "Mr. Gambalino" (Grant Krause) comes to town.

Archer and Engler argue over what gambling profits will be used for — rebuilding Detroit or education — and get into a brawl.

Gambalino starts taking bets —

"OK, I've got \$200," Engler says. Engler gets his butt kicked, then on a loud speaker you hear —

"Canada a safe place to gamble."

Joshua Funk charms everyone

with his lounge lizard act with

music director Chad Krueger, a

See SECOND CITY, E2