

THEATER

JET challenges audience with 'Unexpected Tenderness'

"Unexpected Tenderness" opens at 7:30 p.m. Sunday, March 2 at the Jewish Ensemble Theatre, located in the Aaron Dekoy Theatre, 6800 W. Maple, West Bloomfield. The play runs through Sun. March 23. Wed. and Sun. performances at 7:30 p.m.; Sat. at 8 p.m. Ticket prices: \$13-\$23. For information, call (810) 788-3900.

By FRANK PROVENTZANO
STAFF WRITER

Days before opening night and Evelyn Orbach could barely keep her eyes open. With her sleepily effusive manner, she explained that she had just returned from a trip to Argentina. "We went to explore a foreign culture," said Orbach, artistic director at the Jewish Ensemble Theatre in West

Bloomfield. "It's summertime down there anyway."

It took about 18-hours to travel back home, including a long layover in Miami. But Orbach became revitalized when talking about "Unexpected Tenderness," the upcoming Israel Horowitz play at JET, which opens this Sunday. "What's typical about Horowitz is that he's atypical," she said.

Of course, Horowitz's plays, such as "I Am A Fountain Pen" and "A Rose By Any Other Name" demonstrate that few of his 50-plus plays fit any format. Horowitz divides his time in Israel, the U.S. and Europe. Currently, the prolific playwright is working on a French film.

PREVIEW

Since JET was established eight years ago, Orbach has sought engaging plays with broad themes about humanity, such as "The Diary of Anne Frank," and "Torch Song Trilogy." Or, she has presented provocative dramas that deal with social issues. Clearly, "Unexpected Tenderness" is in the latter class.

By Orbach's admission, Horowitz's provocative play about the travails of a hard-working, lower middle-class family will challenge audiences. Don't expect a pleasant stroll through

a Neil Simon sitcom. Set in a 1950s idyllic household with an unspoken undertow, "Unexpected Tenderness" unfolds as a troubling - and violent - story of domestic abuse.

When Orbach arrived from Argentina last week, the play was in its last phase of production. Although rehearsal was condensed into a three-and-a-half rehearsal schedule, Orbach has remained confident since the initial reading of the play. "A week to rehearse is a life time in theater," she said.

By opening night, audiences should see a JET production that aims for the proverbial "you'll laugh until you'll cry" standard. Tears won't flow from paths or

maudlin situations. Rather, the emotional wrenching will come from hauntingly familiar scenes to typical family life, said Orbach.

In one scene, the mother in the play grows incensed at her two teenagers. She yells for "you" to "get upstairs." When one starts for the stairs, the mother yells, "Not you... You!" Most stressed-out parents can relate to the difficulty in trying to recall their child's name in the heat of the moment. "Horowitz has found the human elements of the drama that are universal," said Orbach.

The play features John Michael Manfredi, who won Best Actor in a lead role for his performance last year in JET's

"Torch Song Trilogy." Director Randall Forte returns to renew his longtime collaboration with Orbach. Forte directed "Bitter Friends" in 1991, JET's second season.

A dynamic interpretation of "Unexpected Tenderness" should reveal that the truth of family drama can be often found in the swirling current spun by what is not expressed - or repressed. "These people are angry and upset and they get through it," said Orbach.

If the quirky characters in Horowitz's play can find solace in a family that appears less than serene, that indeed could be the most "unexpected tenderness."

Deaf from page 1

ing programs at Oakland University, Madonna University, Wayne State University and Michigan State University.

With 90 percent of deaf children born to hearing adults and an aging population prone to hearing loss, Booth hopes the play will bring together the deaf with hearing adult parents. "There's a need for more mentoring," she said. The multi-language play provides for a meeting ground.

After all, with the imaginative "Curiouser and Curiouser," reality can be suspended, and only

the rules of the imagination apply.

"It's like watching a foreign film with subtitles," said Laine Dyer, spokesperson for the National Theatre of the Deaf.

In one highly expressive scene, said Dyer, the play's lead, Alice, encounters a multi-handed caterpillar played by three actors. Their six hands sign in unison with the rhythm of Shakespearean verse, said Dyer. Many of the other eccentric characters are enhanced by sign language, including the fumbling Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

Friday's performance also marks the homecoming of Jorjan Jeter, a 12-year-old actress from Detroit. Jeter, who is deaf in her left ear and uses a hearing aid in her right ear, plays the lead role, Alice.

Two years ago, Jeter was inspired to get into acting after seeing the national theater's performance, "Italian Straw Hat." With more deaf people entering the work force and arts, the last-ling testimony of assimilation might just be that it's not unusual for Jeter to dream, and ask, "Why not?"

Local actors star in Stagecrafters thriller

Stagecrafters will present "Angel Street" by Patrick Hamilton, March 7-23 at the historic Baldwin Theatre, 415 S. Lafayette in downtown Royal Oak. Tickets \$10 to \$12. Call (810) 641-6430.

Set in Victorian London, "Angel Street" is a classic thriller that was made into the movie "Gaslight," starring Ingrid Bergman in 1944.

Behind the door of the Manningham's town house at 13 Angel Street is a web of secrets and deception - and somewhere in the home - a stash of priceless jewels, which belonged to the former owner of the home.

In a sinister plot to remove his wife, who doesn't know of the jewels, the charming Jack Manningham (Mark Stranger of

Rochester Hills) methodically tries to drive his wife, Bella (Jeanine Matlow of Farmington Hills) to insanity.

Once his wife is institutionalized, Jack plans to rip open the walls to find the jewels. The plot thickens when Inspector Rough

of Scotland Yard (Pat Reid) enters the picture with a shocking secret about Jack. A chilling game is then afoot. "Angel Street" also features Julie Christine Newcombe of Farmington Hills as Nancy, the Manningham's maid.



Psychological thriller: (Left to right) Inspector Rough (Pat Reid), Jack Manningham (Mark Stranger of Rochester Hills) and Bella Manningham (Jeanine Matlow of Farmington Hills) in a scene from Stagecrafters' "Angel Street."

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