

THEATER

JET's 'Falsettos' sounds in perfect harmony

Jewish Ensemble Theatre presents "Falsettos" in the Aaron DeRoy Theatre at the Jewish Community Center, 6600 W. Maple, West Bloomfield, through Oct. 5. Call (248) 788-2900 for tickets and show times. Tickets range from \$13 to \$23. Senior, student and group discounts available.

By VICTORIA DIAZ
SPECIAL WRITER

If you're looking for some fine entertainment that's slightly offbeat, you can't lose with "Falsettos," now on-stage at the Jewish Ensemble Theatre.

Directed by Nicholas Calanni, the musical (in which all lines are sung, not spoken) centers around a rather ordinary Jewish guy named Marvin who finds himself facing some really big problems. He has a wife and an adolescent son, and he's fallen hard for a hunky guy named Whizzer.

The Tony Award-winning "Falsettos," written by William Finn and James Lapine, is the first musical ever produced at the JET. Let's hope it's the beginning of a trend. From its opening number, "Four Jews in a Room Bitching," to the concluding "Falsettos," this is simply deli-

cious theatre.

What makes it delicious? Begin with some savvy performances by a cast that seems tailor-made for these upbeat-downbeat tunes and the funny/sad/provocative flavor of this timely play that deals with everything from AIDS to family values to "nouvelle bar mitzvah cuisine."

John Sartor's Marvin seems as ordinary — and as complex — as your next-door neighbor. Somehow, he makes this character — who leaves his wife and young son for the distinctly less-than-perfect Whizzer — both totally convincing and utterly sympathetic.

As the luscious lug, Whizzer, Brian Schulz gets the chance to wear a lot of tight jeans and muscle-hugging T-shirts, while he's winning our hearts as well as Marvin's. No small amount of his appeal lies in his way with a song, especially the confessional, "The Games I Play."

In the role of Trina, the attractive but often-confused wife, Milica Govich turns in an irresistible performance. "The only thing that's breaking up is my family," she sings. "But me — I'm breaking

down."

Let it be noted that we should all possess such charm and style as we fall to pieces.

Jeff Nahan, as the therapist we can't resist Trina, is maybe the most lovable lecher you'll ever come across. And Judy Dery and Barbara Coven as the "lesbians next door" are a talented and dynamic duo.

Finally, Nicholas Cornfield as the caught-in-the-middle, adolescent son, turns in a performance that flirts with brilliance. His Jason is as subtle as he is lively, as able to touch your heart as to tickle your funny bone.

William Finn's music is under the first-rate direction of Ben Cohen. This translates into a confident cast, and proof that it's not necessary to possess a grand singing voice to deliver a song in a very big way.

Combine all of the above with some especially zippy pacing, plus some creative and careful attention to lighting (Mark Berg), costumes (Edith Leavis Bookstein), and sets (Monika Easen), and it's hard to find a single false note in this rendition of "Falsettos."



In the act: John Sartor (left to right), Nicholas Cornfield and Milica Govich in JET's production of "Falsettos."

MUSIC

A new and familiar face at DSO's opening concert

The Detroit Symphony Orchestra opens its new 1997-98 concert season at Orchestra Hall tonight with Polish conductor Jerzy Semkow and 14-year-old piano prodigy Helen Huang as the soloist. The program features Beethoven's Leonore Overture No. 3, Mozart's Piano Concerto in C major (K. 467) and Brahms' Symphony No. 4.

Since last year's concert season, the historic Orchestra Hall neighborhood has undergone a dramatic physical change. Patrons can see Phase I of the \$80 million Orchestra Place Development Project, a new five-story office/retail complex and an 800-car parking deck.

New sidewalks and lamppost banners have also been added to the area. And in early 1998, a new restaurant, Duet, will open near the corner of Woodward and Mack Avenue.

Kicking off the new DSO season, WQRS-FM (105.1) will feature a special opening night broadcast starting at 7 p.m. The show will be hosted by Dave Wagner and feature interviews with musicians, conductors, ticket holders along with recordings of the evening's repertoire.

Featured performers: Semkow and Huang

Over the years, Jerzy Semkow has been one of the DSO's favorite performers.

His conducting posts include tenures at Music Director of the St. Louis Symphony, Principal Conductor of the Royal Danish Opera and the Royal Danish Orchestra in Copenhagen, and Music Director of the Orchestra of Radio-Televisione Italiana in

Rome.

Semkow's recordings include the first complete original version of Mussorgsky's "Boris Godunov." Among his other recordings are major orchestral works by Tchaikovsky and Brahms, the last ten Mozart Symphonies with the National Philharmonic of Warsaw, and Scriabin's Symphony No. 3 and Symphony No. 3 with the London Philharmonic.

Piano prodigy Helen Huang makes her Detroit debut. Her impressive list of engagements include performances with the New York Philharmonic, the Philadelphia Orchestra, The Cleveland Orchestra, the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, the National Symphony Orchestra, the Montreal Symphony and the Israel Chamber Orchestra.

In 1995, Huang appeared with the New York Philharmonic under Kurt Masur, playing Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 23. The concerto was recorded and released on Huang's debut CD later that year. She made her national television debut in a concert with the Boston Pop Orchestra for PBS' "Evening at the Pops."

Music Director Neeme Jarvi will lead the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and guest pianist Murray Perahia in three performances at Orchestra Hall 5 p.m. Friday, Sept. 19; 8:30 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 20; and 3 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 21.

The program will include Estonian composer Rudolf Tobias' Overture to "Julius Caesar," a piano concerto by German Romantic composer Robert Schu-



Director: Neeme Jarvi, music director of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, will make his 1997-98 season debut on Sept. 19.

mann, and Danish composer Carl Nielsen's Symphony No. 6. Perahia will be giving his first performance at Orchestra Hall since 1990 when he appeared in recital. In the thirty years that he has been performing on the concert stage, Perahia has played to sold-out houses, and his Sony Classical discography of over 40 recordings makes him one of today's leading recording artists.

He received a Grammy for Best Chamber Music Performance for his recording of Bartok's "Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion."

In the first behind-the-scenes Pre-Concert Conversation of the season WQRS Program Director Dave Wagner will be the guest on Sept. 12. This series of informal and lively discussions is free to all ticket-holders, and takes place every Friday on the Orchestra Hall stage. Call (313) 833-3700 for more information.

Detroit Symphony Orchestra

What: Detroit Symphony Orchestra 1997-98 opening concert, featuring conductor Jerzy Semkow and pianist Helen Huang
When: 8 p.m. Thursday-Friday, Sept. 11-12, and 8:30 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 13

Where: Orchestra Hall, 3711 Woodward Avenue, Detroit
Tickets: \$17-\$42, box seats: \$60. (313) 833-3700.

Upcoming concerts:

Classical Series

- "A Celebration of Music for Film - I" - 8 p.m. Fri., Sat., and 3 p.m. Oct. 3-5; "A Celebration of Music for Film - II" - 8 p.m. Thur., 8:30 p.m. Sat., 3 p.m. Sun., Oct. 9, 11, 12
- Isaac Stern performs new work, Stravinsky's Symphony in Three Movements. 8 p.m. Thur., Fri. & 8:30 p.m. Sat., Nov. 6-8
- Yo-Yo Ma, "In Recital," 8 p.m. Fri., Jan. 16
- Kathleen Battle performs Haydn's "Maria Theresia," and Ravel's *Daphnis and Chloe*, Suite No. 2, 8 p.m. Thurs., 8:30 p.m. Sat., 3 p.m. Sun., Jan. 29, 31 & Feb. 1

The Pops Series

- Dave Brubeck, 8 p.m. Thur., 8:30 p.m. Fri., Sat. 3 p.m. Sun., Oct. 16-19
 - "Sophisticated Ellington: Symphony and Swing," with special guest Mercedes Ellington, 8 p.m. Thur., 8:30 p.m. Fri., Sat., 3 p.m. Sun., Feb. 5-8
 - "Broadway Night at the Pops: The Music of Cole Porter," 8 p.m. Thur., 8:30 p.m. Fri., Sat. 3 p.m. Sun., Feb. 26-Mar. 1
- The Ameritech Jazz Series**
- Vocalist Cleo Laine & John Dankworth, clarinet, 8 p.m. Thur., Oct. 23
 - House of Blues Tour, 8 p.m. Fri., Dec. 5
 - Sunny Rollins, 8 p.m. Sat., May 16
- Young People's Series (for ages 5-12)**
- "New Tales of the Arabian Nights," 11 a.m. Sat., Oct. 18
 - "How Music Saved the Holidays," 11 a.m. Sat., Dec. 20

Tiny Tots Series (for ages 3-6)

- at Mercy High School in Farmington Hills
- "DSO Valentine Greeting," 10:15 & 11:45 a.m., Sat., Feb. 14
- "Bugs and Balloons," 10:15 & 11:45 a.m., Sat., May 23

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