



World premiere: Charles McGraw (left to right), John Michael Manfredi, Michelle Mountain and Joyce Feuring in a scene from "The Shiva Queen."

## 'Shiva Queen' is no Dolly

Jewish Ensemble Theatre presents "Shiva Queen," by Rebecca Ritchie, continues through Dec. 31 in the Aaron DeRoy Studio Theatre, Jewish Community Center, 6600 West Maple Road, West Bloomfield. Performances: 7:30 p.m. Wednesday-Thursday, and Sunday; 9 p.m. Saturday; 2 p.m. Sunday. Tickets range from \$13 to \$23, discounts available for seniors ages 65 and older, and students, call (248) 788-2900. Special New Year's Eve Performances 7 p.m. and 10 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 31. Tickets for the 7 p.m. New Year's Eve performance are \$35, includes champagne and hors d'oeuvres; 10 p.m. performance tickets \$50 also includes champagne, hors d'oeuvres and breakfast. Call for reservations information.

By BARBARA MICHALS  
SPECIAL WRITER

Despite its intriguing title and billing as a comedy, the Jewish Ensemble Theatre's world premiere of Rebecca Ritchie's "The Shiva Queen" is neither clever nor funny. Instead, a very fine cast does its best with very mediocre material.

Act One is the exchange of letters between two singles who meet through a "personals" ad

and write to each other's P.O. box numbers. Lee (Charles McGraw) is a hypochondriac geneticist so afraid of commitment that he hesitates to even give out his name to his pen pal, Shirli (Michelle Mountain), anxious to find a mate, is so wishy-washy that she offers to make herself into anything Lee wishes.

Five years later Act Two finds Shirli has been married and widowed. She now earns a living organizing the shiva, the traditional Jewish ritual period of seven days of deep mourning, for those too grief-stricken to handle the details themselves.

She has been called in to help Roger (John Michael Manfredi), a successful endodontist who has just lost the wife he adored and turns into a helpless child when pounced upon by his overbearing all-business mother Bess (Joyce Feuring).

Turns out that Bess is some sort of famous fatal expert, and when Lee calls at the house in pursuit of genetic research on the deceased, Bess's domineering personality brings out his devoted servility. Meanwhile, Shirli now has enough self-confidence to quietly stand up to Bess and thus earns Roger's gratitude and affection.

If there is a point to all this, it seems to be suggesting that one should be neither too weak nor too strong-willed. Perhaps there is comic potential here somewhere, but on opening night "The Shiva Queen" drew only an isolated chuckle now and then. A Jewish "Hello Dolly" it is not.

All four players are very talented actors who make their characters as believable as possible, with Mountain meeting the greatest challenge in giving substance to Shirli. Under director Joanna Hastings Woodcock, nearly all aspects of the production seem as fine-tuned as the material allows.

The costuming is sometimes questionable, though. Putting Roger in his pajamas certainly enhances the image of him as a floundering child, but would a man really wear this on his way home just because he'd been staying overnight at the hospital with his dying wife? It's appropriately symbolic that Lee wears a facial mask to keep him apart from the families he interviews, but why a pointed mask that makes him look like a clown?

## Crafters turn promoting into art



LINDA ANN CHOMIN

Sue Smith and Molly Pemberton were tired of trying to sell their crafts at shows where promoters treated them with little respect, so the two Canton residents decided to strike out on their own.

After taking part in a shop run as a cooperative by crafters, they started the Handcrafters Arts and Crafts Show 16 years ago. Over the years, they've built this arts and crafters show into a profitable business.

"It was nice because I have three children and they were little at the time," said Smith. "My husband could stay home on the weekends while we produced the shows."

### Upcoming show

If you're still in need of a few gifts for the holidays, don't miss their next show featuring 65 exhibitors Dec. 12-14 at the Northville Recreation Center, 303 West Main in Northville. Hours are 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Friday, until 5 p.m. Saturday, and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday.

Admission is \$2. For more information, call (424) 459-0503. Handcrafters is one of the few shows around, produced by crafters. Smith, who holds a patent on her work, creates wreaths from whole spices such as nutmeg, bay leaf, cinnamon, and star anise. Pemberton cuts and paints wood gingerbread men, snowmen and Santa ornaments.

"We understand what it's like to be crafters, how it feels to be turned down for a show," said Smith. "People don't realize that crafts are a time-consuming job, 10 to 12 hours a day, not just a weekend show. These crafters are professionals so we treat them with respect."

Dennis Gerathy's vintage-looking signs are sure to be popular with University of Michigan fans. Gerathy crafts the signs in his Redford shop. Among the other works included in the show

are hand painted dog and cat ornaments by Marlene DeFoor of Livonia; quilted and cross stitched ornaments, Roberta Baraszu, Plymouth; stained glass vases and boxes, Marsha Filipiak, Royal Oak, and seasonal florals, Sandy Callahan, Bloomfield Hills.

### Variety

"We feel we have the best variety of craftsmen in the area," said Pemberton. "Our customers come back year after year. There's something for everybody's taste and pocket book from Victorian Christmas Carol dolls to porcelain Santas, and shadow boxes shaped into French gardens. There's ornaments for \$3 to larger Santas for a couple hundred dollars."

Handcrafters hosts six shows a year, three in Northville, two in Taylor and one in Mt. Clemens. Smith and Pemberton welcome artists and craftsmen to apply for entry in the juried shows. The two try to exhibit 25 percent new crafters at each show.

in handmade items and the quality of workmanship," said Smith. "We like to think our show has craftsmen you wouldn't see anywhere else. I exhibit in a lot of shows out of state, so I see some unique, one-of-a-kind items what I try to bring into our show. We want to make sure we have the \$5 items for a teacher's gift as well as a lot of personalized items. We also try to get fine arts. The emphasis is definitely on fine crafts but we do have fine arts, also."

Smith display her wreaths in 30 shows a year. That's a full-time business in itself. So why do Smith and Pemberton continue to promote shows after all these years?

"We like doing our crafts, but the promoting part is our great love," said Smith. "We have, artists and craftsmen who have been with us since we've started. They've become friends."

Linda Ann Chomin is an arts reporter for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

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