

THE WEEKEND

FRIDAY



Get a double dose of jazz artistry when legendary jazz pianist Chick Corea and vibes master Gary Burton team up for a concert 8 p.m. in the Michigan Theater, 603 E. Liberty St., Ann Arbor. Tickets \$30 to \$20, (734) 764-2538 or (800) 221-1229.

SATURDAY

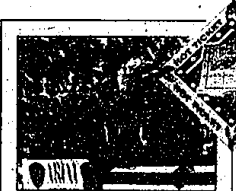


A special "South Park" video will be shown during Comedy Central's "Stand-Up For Sanity" which also features comedians Jon Stewart and Reggie McFadden, 7 p.m. at the Majestic, 4140 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Tickets \$8 in advance for the all-ages show. Call (313) 833-9700 or <http://www.99music.com>

SUNDAY



Dance Theatre of Harlem performs 3 p.m. at Music Hall Center for the Performing Arts, 350 Madison Ave., Detroit. Range from \$31.50 to \$41.50, call (313) 963-2366, or (248) 646-6666.



Hot Tix: The Longhorn World Championship Rodeo comes to The Palace of Auburn Hills Friday, Feb. 20 through Sunday, Feb. 22. Tickets \$18, \$14 and \$12, call (248) 646-6666. Tummi Tugan of Livonia is among the cowboys competing in the steer wrestling competition.



LIFE MIRRORS 'UNBEATABLE' STORY LINE

STORY BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN • STAFF WRITER

Gordon Michaels is a lot like the lead character he plays in the film "Unbeatable Harold"—determined against all odds to bring the story to the big screen.

Michaels sat in the Caribou Coffee Shop in Royal Oak undaunted by the lack of funds necessary to produce his film. Michaels was here visiting his mother, Elvira Karmineke, in Westland before leaving for Reno, Nev., to shoot the film.

"I like comedy," said Michaels, who's also directing and producing the film. "There's so many action and shoot-em-up movies out there so why not focus on a love story and throw in a dance number and some slapstick."

A graduate of John Glenn High School in Westland, Michaels wrote the screenplay for "Unbeatable Harold" after a one-act play by Randy Noojin. Michaels originated the role of the Elvis wannabe Off-Broadway. Bringing the play to film marks a nine-year commitment for Michaels, who's also acted the part on Los Angeles and Miami stages.

"Unbeatable Harold" is about a dreamer and hopeless romantic, living 20 years behind the times in 1970s clothes and platform shoes, who's fallen in love with Wanda (Christine Cavanaugh), the voice of "Babe" the pig," said Michaels. "It's your boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy finds girl and lives happily every after."

Filming is complete except for a few scenes postponed until March because Dylan McDermott's shooting schedule for the popular ABC-TV show "The Practice" conflicted with filming "Unbeatable Harold." McDermott plays Wanda's ex-boyfriend. Michaels has appeared in several episodes of "The Practice" with McDermott and is currently in negotiations to extend his part in the show.

"Dylan's a friend, it's a favor for him to do the film," explained Michaels. "His salary would equal half our budget."

Although this is Michaels' first attempt at directing, he's no stranger to the screen, having acted in films such as "Air Force One" with Harrison Ford, "Jurassic Park: The Lost World" directed by Steven Spielberg, "Leaving Las Vegas," "Destiny Turns on the Radio" and "Hacks" with Tom Arnold and John Ritter.

"I have such a vested interest, I couldn't let someone else direct," said Michaels. "Maybe if it were

another play, but not this one."

Elvira Karmineke had no hint her son would eventually choose a career in film and theater. He wanted to be a chiropractor. So it was only natural she worried when Gordon told her about applying to the Neighborhood Playhouse until learning of the school's prestigious reputation. When she saw him perform on the stage of the New York Playhouse, Karmineke realized the talent which lay buried all those years.

"He was very funny when he was a child, but I never had any idea even though he played in the band and he could sing," said Karmineke. "When I saw him in the play, I couldn't believe this was my son. It was beautiful."

Michaels never let on to his mother, but by the time he was playing varsity basketball at John Glenn High School, and even before injuring a knee, the bright lights were his future. After graduating from the Westland high school, Michaels moved to Arizona in 1981 where he attended acting school in Phoenix before moving to New York.

"It really hit me when I was a junior," said Michaels. "I always sang in choir at school and was in rock bands in high school (Flash Experience)."

Even though the theater in New York holds special memories for Michaels, that's where he acted in his first production, "Pippin," he eventually left in search of golden opportunities in California's film industry. For the last eight years he's lived in Venice on the Beach.

"I wanted to get involved with film so I had to move to L.A.," said Michaels. "To make some money you have to go into film. I didn't want to be a struggling actor in theater."

Michaels is planning to premiere "Unbeatable Harold" in early summer at either the Royal Oak or Birmingham theaters. Although far from home now, Michaels visits Michigan often and has no plans to write the state out of his life. In fact, he plans someday to produce in Detroit a one-act play written in New York.

"Because I'm from Detroit, I thought it would be nice to bring the premiere of 'Unbeatable Harold' here," said Michaels. "Even though I don't miss the Michigan winters and scraping two inches of ice off the windshield, I do miss the Michigan summers and my family."



STAFF PHOTO BY JIM JAGIELLO

Unbeatable love story: Gordon Michaels writes, directs, produces, and acts in a film about an Elvis wannabe and the girl of his dreams.

Local talent line up for place to 'Rent'

BY JULIE YOLLES
SPECIAL WRITER

They came from Miami, Cincinnati, Windsor, Ann Arbor, Grand Rapids, Detroit and the suburbs. They wore black leather, black spandex, black cords, black velvet, black polyester, black jeans, black fishnets, black chemo, Kenneth Cole belts and chunky silver ball necklaces. They were sporting Doc Martens and Spice Girl platforms from beneath their used Levi 571 bell bottoms. They had pierced ears, navels and tongues. They wore Hard Candy Superman blue metallic nail polish, MAC Alumina lipstick and glitter eye makeup. It was East Village retro all around.



Natalie Ross

What seemed more like a precursor to a fashion shoot for the Salvation Army on the streets of Royal Oak, was really 700 hopefuls looking for a new lease on life. Or just looking to "Rent."

When the rock opera "Rent" comes to the Fisher Theatre April 8 to May 31, perhaps one or more of these 700 aspiring actors will be a part of the ensemble. That's what the production team of "Rent" was hoping for when they scheduled a one-day open casting call at the Detroit Opera House Thursday, Jan. 22.

"We're seeking authentic kick-ass

Rent
When: Show opens Wednesday, April 8, and continues through Sunday, May 31.
Where: Fisher Theatre, 3011 W. Grand Boulevard, Detroit.
Tickets: Range in price from \$60 to \$24, call (248) 645-6666.

singers in Detroit because we heard it's the most rockin', hip-hoppin', stompin', soul-searchin' city in the country," stated the casting notice, which was blanketed throughout the state and outlying areas.

And rockin', hip-hoppin', stompin' and soul-searchin' is what they got—starting at 7:15

a.m., on that 18-degree morning, when the line started forming on Detroit's Madison Avenue outside the theater.

Auditions started at 10 a.m. and didn't wrap until 12-12 hours later—long after Cathy Rigby and her "Peter Pan" cast, who were performing that night at the Detroit Opera House, had gone off to never-never land.

Natalie Ross, a senior at Churchill High School in Livonia, skipped school to audition. She signed in at 9 a.m. and finally got to sing at 12:30 p.m. for Heidi Marshall, casting director of New York's Bernard Telesy Casting. Ross made the first cut, learned a song from the show with a piano accompanist and sang four hours later for Marshall at the callbacks.

"I always wear black pants to auditions—they're universal, sexy and flattering," said Ross, who saw "Rent" on Broadway and heard about the casting call from her friend at Western Michigan University. "I wore the orange shirt to be seen."

The desires were intense. The competition fierce. Nothing was going to deter the horde of twenty-somethings from auditioning. Practically the entire University of Michigan Musical

Please see RENT, E2

COLLEGE THEATER

Director gives heart to 'A Woman of No Importance'

"Children begin by loving their parents. After a time they judge them. Rarely, if ever, do they forgive them."

—Oscar Wilde
"A Woman of No Importance"

BY HUGH GALLAGHER
STAFF WRITER

Irish playwright Oscar Wilde was the master of the epigram, the bon mot, the pithy, acidic phrase.

Many of these epigrams have become a part of the language, noted for their rueful truths or their outrageousness. But to produce an Oscar Wilde play, you have to make the epigrams seem natural even though Wilde himself admitted he never let a story get in the way of a good epigram.

A Woman of No Importance

What: Oscar Wilde comedy-drama.
Where: Hilberry Theatre on the campus of Wayne State University, Detroit.
When: In repertory through Thursday, April 23.
Tickets: Range in price from \$10 to \$17. Call the box office, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday-Friday at (313) 577-2972.

Wayne State University's Hilberry Theatre has recruited Ontario director Antoni Cimolino, associate producer of the Stratford Festival, to bring life to one of Wilde's more difficult works, a play that begins as a comedy of manners and develops into

a soul-wrenching melodrama. Cimolino, 36, wants to emphasize Wilde's big heart.

"He said his talent went into his writing, but his genius went into his life," Cimolino said. "I'm interested in what's underneath. He's very humane and caring about people. He was a socialist, but I think that was just lip service. He was really a humanist. His interest wasn't in economics but in the soul."

"A Woman of No Importance," is set in the late 1800s among the aristocrats of England. A promising young man has been offered the position of secretary to the pleasure-loving, snobbish Lord Illingworth.

Please see WOMAN, E2



Divided family: Standing, Wendy Gough as Mrs. Arbuthnot and Bret Tuomi as Lord Illingworth are the parents of the devastated Gerald played by Matt Troyer, kneeling.

Stratford director: Antoni Cimolino of the Stratford Festival is the guest director for the Hilberry's production of "A Woman of No Importance."