

Bob Milne loves to play ragtime, boogie-woogie

Ragtime/boogie-woogie pianist Bob Milne presents "The Many Sounds of Ragtime," 2 p.m. Sunday, May 17 in Varner Recital Hall on the campus of Oakland University, Rochester. Tickets \$10 general admission, \$5 students. Proceeds benefit the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra and Baltimore Symphony Orchestra.

Bob Milne fooled around on the piano, but he played French horn. After graduating from the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, N.Y., he became an accomplished horn virtuoso and played with major East Coast Symphonies including the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra and Baltimore Symphony Orchestra.

After work, he and his friends would meet at a bar and play around with music. "It was the early 1960s, and there were a lot of sing-along places," said Milne. "I'd say, 'just sing it to me, and I'll play it.'"

He got pretty good at playing the piano, even though he'd never taken a lesson.

"The place hired me," he said, "the astonishment still in his voice. 'I couldn't believe they were paying me to something so



In concert: Ragtime/boogie-woogie pianist Bob Milne presents "The Many Sounds of Ragtime," Sunday at Varner Recital Hall on the campus of Oakland University, Rochester.

simple." Milne was having fun, and pretty soon he got so many offers to play that he quit play-

ing French horn. "It evolved into a career," he said. "I learned by listening to other pianists."

When he moved back to metro Detroit, Milne a graduate of Rochester High School and Oakland University, started

playing piano at the Dakota Inn Rathskeller, a restaurant known for its singalongs and German fare, on John R. in Detroit.

It was there that he discovered ragtime. "It's a folk style of playing - ragged time - that originated in the South," said Milne who since became one of the top ragtime/boogie-woogie pianists in the United States and Canada.

"I played in that style, and would apply it to songs like 'Bill Bailey.' Later on I heard a guy play, and said 'What was that?' The Maple Leaf Rag," he said. "It was the piece of music that fit the style of music I had been playing."

After hearing "Maple Leaf Rag," Milne studied ragtime, and boogie-woogie, "the bad boy of rag," too.

In the 1970s he played piano at Chuck Muer restaurants including Charley's Crab in Troy. He began playing concerts in 1990 and spends at least half a year on the road.

His audience spans all ages, and besides entertainment, Milne throws in a history lesson too explaining that Ragtime and boogie-woogie are American art forms. "It helps to get people

to listen to this stuff and learn about American music," he said. "Scott Joplin was a piano player who played at the Maple Leaf Club in Missouri," said Milne explaining how this famous rag got its name.

Boogie-woogie has a lot of rhythm and will make you move, but it's extremely complex music. It makes you happy and sad at the same time, and evolved into the blues.

When he's not on the road performing in concerts, Milne goes to Kiwanis meetings, and catches up on work around his house in Lapeer.

"I have avoided joining groups," he said. "Someone took me to a meeting, and it was chaotic and hilariously fun. They raise money and give it to people who need it. I went through some tough times and people gave me money not expecting it back. This is a chance for me to return the favor."

Milne was planning to play a concert at Oakland University, and decided to help the local Kiwanis chapter too. Concert proceeds will benefit the Rochester Kiwanis funds for local worthy causes.

'Elixir of Love' intoxicating mixture of singing, acting

Michigan Opera Theatre presents "The Elixir of Love" by Gaetano Donizetti 8 p.m. Friday & Saturday, May 15-16; 2 p.m. Sunday, May 17 at Detroit Opera House, (at the corner of Madison Avenue and Broadway, one block east of Woodward Avenue). Detroit tickets \$18-\$95, call (313) 874-7464, or (248) 646-6666.

BY MARY JANZ DOERR
SPECIAL WRITER

Michigan Opera Theatre has come up with the right concoction in "The Elixir of Love." It is an intoxicating mixture of grand singing, pouring out from the hearts of the great actors, Mario

Corradi's comedic directing style, and the spirited handling of the orchestra by Steven Mercurio. Perhaps Mercurio is still reved up from his recent "Batman" CD that brings so much life to Donizetti's music.

On stage, the scene is a delightful Japanese mad set of revolving stucco buildings with rippled-tiled red-roofs that form an Italian village, the farm of a rich young carefree Adina. In a story-telling style, director Corradi stylishly introduces his characters using the scrim and lighting effects during composer Donizetti's tuneful overture.

The story opens as the lovesick farm boy, Nemorino, lyrical-

ly sung by an MOT favorite, tenor Vinson Cole, declares his love for Adina. Detroit's Janet Williams is the capricious Adina. Twelve years ago she first caught MOT General Director David DiChiera's eye at the Detroit Metropolitan Opera auditions, and she has been captivating international attention ever since.

Saturday evening she returned again, taking leave from her Berlin Opera position, to give a touching performance, singing a warm "Prendi, per me sei libero" that left no doubt as to why she is capturing so many hearts.

The love triangle is rounded out with bass-baritone Richard

Bernstein's humorous portrayal of the conceited army Sergeant Belcore. The range is perhaps a little high for this fabulous voice, but Bernstein maintains a perfect smirk on his face and the right punchy style in his "Come Paride vezzoso" as he tries to win the heart of the whimsical town beauty, Adina.

Adina has read the Celtic tale of Queen Isolde's love potion to the illiterate villagers. So, when the town peddler arrives, the quick Doctor Dulcamara, local yokel Nemorino wants to buy his love potion so Adina will fall in love with him. In what seems like the return of last season's highly successful "Marriage of

Figaro" cast (Bernstein, Williams, and Hammons), here the charmingly funny Thomas Hammons is the quack. With his clown-styled hair, and bright costumes, the adept actor Hammons has the antics and the bel canto voice to sell his cure-all remedy.

This 1832 version of "Love Potion No. 9" is really Dulcamara's Love Potion Bordeaux Wine. Taken in double doses, it makes Nemorino stand offish which sparks Adina's romantic interest. What really sparks the village girl's romantic interest is Gianetta's (Samia Bahu) news that Nemorino's rich uncle has died

living him his fortune.

From the moment he opens the opera, Cole's pleasant Nemorino has the audience's sympathy. His Pavarotti hit tune "Una furitiva lagrima" was sung with impassioned tenderness that hushed the audience. His lovely Nemorino deserves Adina's affections especially with Cole's melodic blending with Williams in "Chiedi all'aura lusinghiera."

These artists capture Donizetti's musical style in a lively manner, and the many beautiful duets and ensembles make this show a panacea for common ills. The entire production is a love tonic that is certainly no placebo.

For Young Audiences:
Mark Rademacher (left to right), Bartholome Williams and Gregory Brown are featured in "Wilderness" and "Straw Soldiers," two one act plays by Karim Alrawi at Meadow Brook Theatre on the campus of Oakland University.



Take your kids to 'play' this weekend

This is a good weekend to take your kids to the theater. Meadow Brook Theatre's Theatre for Young Audiences will be performing two new one act plays by Karim Alrawi, "Straw Soldiers," and "Wilderness" at Meadow Brook Theatre on the campus of Oakland University in Rochester, Thursday, May 14 to Sunday, May 17.

"Straw Soldiers" will be presented 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. Thursday-Friday, May 14-15; "Straw Soldiers & Wilderness" will be presented 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. Saturday, May 16, and 2 p.m. Sunday, May 17. Tickets are \$10 adults, and \$5 for children 12 and under. Call (248) 377-3300 for tickets. Youththeatre at Music Hall

Center, 350 Madison Ave. (at Brush) in Detroit is presenting "Young Tom Edison," a musical by New York's Theatreworks/USA, 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. Saturday, May 16 and 2 p.m. Sunday, May 17. Tickets are \$7 (advance) \$8 (at the door), no one under the age of five admitted to theater, call (313) 963-2366.

"Straw Soldiers" involves Pete a Michigan farm boy whose father burns his neighbor's barn. One day Pete and his sister are confronted with the need to choose between covering for their father and doing what is right.

In "Wilderness" a young African-American goes to

France during World War I. At the battle front he finds himself questioning his own identity and the reasons for going to war.

Karim Alrawi is Meadow Brook Theatre's playwright-in-residence. Performing in the plays will be Gregory Brown, Mark Rademacher, Bartholome Williams and Laura Wing. Debra L. Wicks, Meadow Brook Theatre's associate director, is directing.

At Youththeatre
New York's Theatreworks/

USA musical "Young Tom Edison" at Music Hall Center, May 16-17 explores the life of the tireless inventor who took the world from darkness into light.

The show is perfect for families with children ages seven and older. Prior to the Saturday morning performance, Bobbi Lucas, a Detroit area performer, artist and educator, will conduct a "Pre-show Playshop" in creative dramatics. The cost for the workshop is \$8 per child. Reservations can be made when playing ticket orders at the Music Hall Ticket office (313) 963-2366.

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