

STREET SCENE

Space Nelson opens champagne after radio play

As a musician, John Piasentin always thought it would be a thrill to hear his music on the radio.

So when Detroit Red Wing Darren McCarty played a song by Piasentin's band Space Nelson during his shift with Jerry Miller on WRRK, it was over the top.

"A big goal of mine was I'd love to hear my thing on the radio. I couldn't believe K-ROCK (WRRK) played it at 6 p.m. on a Tuesday. We were so excited. Eric (Fischer, drummer) brought over champagne," said singer Piasentin.

The song was from the Livonia-based band's debut CD "Cutting Edge Pinball," a seven-song EP filled with influences that ricochet between Rush, King Crimson, Pearl Jam and

Soundgarden.

"We listen to anything where you can tell they put some thought behind what they're writing, and you can tell the musicians took some time to work on their parts," Piasentin said.

Fischer and Piasentin began writing the songs five years ago. With some of the songs, only a few guitar riffs remain. When the duo solidified its lineup two years ago with keyboardist/guitarist Matt Boos of Livonia and bassist Scott Thompson of Farmington, they filled out its sound.

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the longest time. Finally, he twisted my arm to do it," Piasentin said.

Piasentin admitted that he was a little apprehensive about stepping behind the mic.

"I didn't have the confidence to do it for a long time. But it got easier," he explained.

Much in the same vein of King Crimson and Rush, Space Nelson transcends the lines of traditional rock on "Cutting Edge Pinball."

"There's a lot of technical stuff and more straight forward rock songs like 'Today the Day' and 'Best Disguise,'" he explained.

"Cutting Edge Pinball" was recorded at The Disk in East-pointe with Steve Sainio.

"He was a really cool to work

with," Piasentin explained. "He wasn't condescending."

Fischer added. For Space Nelson it is just as important to keep its listeners stimulated musically and visually.

"So many bands sit and stand there. We're interested in keeping the crowd interested visually. We have fun up there," Piasentin said.

Space Nelson performs on 18 and older show at 9 p.m. Friday, July 10, at Rivertown Saloon, 1917 E. Woodbridge St., in Detroit. Call (313) 567-6020 for more information; and with Mirror Image, 9 p.m. Friday, July 10, at Grille 49 N. Saginaw. Pontiac. That show open to those 21 and older. For more information, call (248) 334-9292.



"Cutting Edge": Livonia-based Space Nelson - from left, keyboardist/guitarist Matt Boos of Livonia, drummer Eric Fischer of Livonia, bassist Scott Thompson of Farmington, and singer John Piasentin of Livonia.

THEATER

Shaw teases with provocative, funny 'Major Barbara'

BY HUGH GALLAGHER
STAFF WRITER

George Bernard Shaw's plays are multi-layered, complex and devious. And "Major Barbara" may be his most devious work of all.

"Major Barbara," at the Festival Theatre, is one of two Shaw plays being presented at this year's Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario.

As often in Shaw's plays, this is both a spirited comedy and a philosophical discussion. In this case all the good lines go to someone usually cast as the villain - a munitions manufacturer millionaire. But with irony, sharp wit and a total rejection of the usual pieties, Shaw's play argues against the scourge of poverty and the sham of any religion that accepts false conversion.

Barbara is the older daughter of munitions king Andrew Undershaft. She has taken a position with the Salvation Army, partly to make up for her father's fortune.

Undershaft hasn't lived with his family for years because his wife threw him out when he told her that their son wouldn't inherit the munitions works. The son, a weak child of the aristoc-

racy, is ashamed of his father but happy to live off the fortune.

Director Helena Kaut-Hawson's production is stylishly presented, clearly delineated and well cast. All the rich insights into English class society are presented with both humor and compassion and every startling and, on the surface, offensive argument rings with full clarity.

Jim Mezon's Andrew Undershaft is perfectly understood, a man who waits, listens and then pounces, but with a rare and practiced civility. Here is a man you can't help but like even though you despise so much of what he has to say. Mezon carries his body with a peculiar erectness and fuses it with his clothes in the fashion of one not born to wealth but accommodating to it.

And what great lines. On the crime of poverty: "The worst of crimes. All other crimes are virtues beside it; all other dishonours are chivalry itself by comparison. Poverty blights whole cities; spreads horrible pestilences; strikes dead the very souls of those who come within sight, sound and smell of it."

Kelli Fox (younger sister of television star Michael J. Fox) is a strong, intelligent Barbara,

who gives full measure in her arguments. Richard Binsley is hilarious but finally steely as Barbara's Greek scholar fiancé who finally succumbs to his future father-in-law. Colin Magnier plays the working class bully Bill Walker with a telling conviction and self regard. Sherry Flett is amusingly domineering as Lady Undershaft.

William Schmuck's "forced perspective" sets are vigorous. The time has been updated from 1905 to 1950 to make the munitions operation a nuclear weapons factory. The sets move on a turn table that works well in the second act Salvation Army clypease and in the shifting tour of the nuclear plant.

The updating is subtle but reminds us that Shaw is still relevant to our circumstances. "Major Barbara" continues until Nov. 1.

The Shop at Sly Corner

Each year the Shaw Festival presents a mystery, a popular form of theater that developed in Victorian times and has continued to be a staple.

This year's selection is Edward Percy's "The Shop at Sly Corner," at the Royal George. But there is no mystery involved, really, and

it's hard to figure out what the exact purpose of this curious work is. It's a character study, but the character under examination isn't very likeable or very interesting.

Desclus Heiss owns a jewelry shop in London. He has a messy, dusty office in back. He is alternately pleasant and sentimental and nasty and grim. He has a secret, a past that could catch up with him.

He lives with his sister and his attractive adult daughter, on whom he dotes. She is engaged to a ship's doctor.

Heiss treats his young clerk, a nasty man himself, with derision and even physical abuse. This, of course, comes back to bite him.

Those are the elements for a story that moves predictably and all we're left to ponder are the performances.

Michael Ball as Desclus is perhaps a bit too much on the nasty side to win over audience interest, too brooding and intense. Jonathan Watton is appropriately snippy as the clerk. Jennifer Phipps gives the most engaging performance as the tipsy housekeeper.

Director Joseph Ziegler doesn't have much to work with here, though the mechanics are satis-

factory. David Boechler's set is more complex and enticing than the play. "Shop" continues until Oct. 31.

For ticket information, call (800) 511-SHAW (7429). Or visit their website at showfest.sympatico.ca.

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