

THE WEEKEND

FRIDAY



Neeme Jarvi conducts the Detroit Symphony Orchestra in their season opener featuring violinist Joshua Bell, 8 p.m. at Detroit Orchestra Hall. Tickets \$17 to \$48 (Box seats: \$55 and \$63. At the Orchestra Hall Box Office or by calling (313) 576-6111.

SATURDAY



The Chenille Sisters kick off the Millennium Centre's 1998-99 season 2 p.m. in a family show designed to delight children ages 3-8. Tickets \$10, available at the box office, 15600 J. L. Hudson Dr. in Southfield, or Ticketmaster outlets. Call (248) 552-1225.

SUNDAY



Robert Goulet stars in "Camelot" 1 p.m. and 6 p.m. at the Fox Theatre. Tickets \$17.50 to \$42.50, available at the Fox Theatre Box Office, and all Ticketmaster locations, call (248) 433-1515.



Hot Tip: Jazz violinist Christian Hoves performs 12:30 p.m. Sunday, on the Wayne State Stage during the 12th Annual Detroit Festival of the Arts, Friday-Sunday, Sept. 18-20 in Detroit's Cultural Center area. The celebration of the arts features more than 500 visual and performing artists. Admission is free. Call (313) 677-6088 for more information.

WHAT: "Chicago - The Musical," Book by Bob Fosse and Fred Ebb, Music by John Kander, lyrics by Fred Ebb.

WHERE: Detroit's Fisher Theater

WHEN: Sept. 22 to Oct. 11, 8 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays, 7:30 p.m. Sundays and 2 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays.

TICKETS: \$62 to \$35. Call (248) 645-6666.



Chicago

BY HUGH GALLAGHER • STAFF WRITER

It was 8:45 a.m. Houston time and Anna Thicke was riding in a limo for the first of a long morning of radio and television interviews to promote his appearance in the touring company of "Chicago."

"You have to be in a limo," he said by cellular phone, "it's 300 degrees here."

Thicke, best known for his role as the dad in the hit situation comedy "Growing Pains," is playing sleek lawyer and con artist Billy Flynn in the Bob Fosse, Kander-Ebb musical that won a new lease on life when it was restaged to critical acclaim on Broadway a couple years ago.

The touring company opens at Detroit's Fisher Theater Tuesday, Sept. 22, the last stop for Thicke before he joins the New York cast.

Though most remember Thicke as the affable psychiatrist Jason Seaver in "Growing Pains," he actually got his start in music, as a rock and roll singer and in musical comedy.

"I had my training in musical theater in Toronto," he said. "I was

involved in a musical revue with Lorne Michaels (later producer of "Saturday Night Live"), Victor Garber and Gilda Radner. But there wasn't much call for a singing and dancing psychiatrist dad on a situation comedy."

Thicke said he did a production of "Promises, Promises" last year with "Seinfeld's" Jason Alexander, another sit-com performer who got his start in musical theater. Though he had been offered roles on Broadway, nothing felt right until "Chicago" came along.

"Chicago" originally opened in 1975 to moderate success, though it featured a lively score by John Kander and Fred Ebb and innovative choreography by Bob Fosse. Two years ago, the musical was revived under the direction of Walter Bobbie and with choreography by Ann Reinking in the Fosse style. It won rave reviews and has been drawing sell-out audiences.

Please see CHICAGO, E2

Alan Thicke enjoys 'sleazy lawyer' role in Broadway musical



On stage: Photo above, Stephanie Pope (center) as Velma Kelly, and company perform "All That Jazz" in the six-time Tony-Award-winning Broadway musical, "Chicago." At left, Alan Thicke.

COMMUNITY THEATER

Avon Players off to a smashing start with 'Oliver!'

BY LISA BUCZKO
SPECIAL WRITER

Avon Players' season opener has all the ingredients for success: a charismatic leading actor; excellent set design, costumes, lighting, choreography; and, an orchestra that's in tune with the play's original music.

If the sold-out opening night performance is any indication of this year's bill, it should be a very good year for community theater in Rochester Hills.

Based on Dickens' "Oliver Twist," the Avon Players' musical rendition was expertly produced by Marlaina Jurco, directed and choreographed by Karen Upchurch (who stood in for Bet on opening night). Margaret Wunschl handed the musical direction.

Overall, the Avon Player's "Oliver!" has the right touch of humor and dramatic pacing. In addition to the well-timed execution, the chorus was in perfect harmony and the choreography in step.

In his acting debut, 9-year-old Dennis Strach's charming and spirited portrayal of this classic ragged orphan stole the show. While most Oliver's are fair of hair, Strach has puppy dog brown eyes and very

dark hair. He was more than convincing and added a breath of fresh air to Dickens' well-loved tale.

Another stand-out young actor making his debut on Avon's stage was 12-year-old Jon Dalton, who played the adorable trouble-maker Artful Dodger with plenty of attitude. His accent was flawless and he more than complemented Avon veteran Rick Gebbie's manipulative, conniving Fagin.

Nancy, played by Kristy Northcott, also a veteran of Avon, gave a fiery, colorful performance as Fagin's love interest. Her well-projected voice combined with her shining confidence radiated the stage.

John Deierlein did a wonderful job with the lighting design, which enhanced the scenery, time of day and complemented the ambience of the production.

The only production element a bit off key was the sound. Considering "Oliver!" is the Avon Players initial production of the season, there's no doubt the system quirks and distracting feedback will soon be ironed-out.

Meanwhile, the orchestra was seamless, made up of Margaret Wunschl on keyboard, Baron Von Korno on trumpet, Lord Nelson on trombone, Lady Anne on flute, Sir Harold DeClarino on Clarinet, and Tom Tom Aston on percussion.

Of course, since "Oliver!" is a musical, the singing is crucial. Avon Players didn't disappoint.

From "Food, Glorious Food," sung by Oliver and the orphans, and "That's Your Funeral" by Mr. & Mrs. Sowerberry (Jeff Schuster and Peggy Jones), to "I'll Do Anything,"

by Artful Dodger, Nancy, Oliver, Bet, Fagin and the kids and the beloved "Oom-pah-pah" by Nancy and the chorus, the singing was uplifting and hit all the right notes.

Avon Players' production of Oliver! is a show that has something for everyone - from the young to the young at heart.

Avon Players 1998-99 Season

Avon Players is celebrating their 51st season this year. A season highlight is "Children of Eden," a musical from Stephen Schwartz, the composer/lyricist of "Godspell" and "Pippin," and John Cold, to be presented in March.

"I think we're the first community theater group in the area to do this fabulous musical," said Jean Garinger. "It should be spectacular. There's a huge children's chorus."

All shows are at 8 p.m., except for Sunday matinees which are at 2 p.m. This year, Avon Players added a 1 p.m. Saturday matinee for its current production, "Oliver!"

TICKETS are \$15 for musicals, and \$13 for non-musicals with student, senior and group rates available for Thursday and Sunday performances.

SEASON TICKETS are \$65, and includes all five shows. Performances are at the theater on Tienken Road (1 1/4 miles east of Rochester Road) in Rochester Hills. Call (248) 608-9077 for ticket information.

■ "Oliver!" - 8 p.m. Friday, Sept. 18, 1 p.m. and 8 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 19, 2 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 20; 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, Sept. 25-26, 2 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 27; 8 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, Oct. 1-3.

■ "The Foreigner" - Oct. 30-31 and Nov. 1; Nov. 6-8; Nov. 12-14.

■ "The Children's Hour" - March 5-7; March 12-14; March 19-20.

■ "Children of Eden" - April 30, May 1-2; May 7-8; May 14-16; May 20-22.