

**THEATER**

# 'Blood Brothers,' intense drama

The Players Guild of Dearborn presents Willy Russell's musical drama "Blood Brothers" on Friday-Saturday May 14-15 and 21-22; and 2:30 p.m. Sunday, May 16 and 23. The Guild is on Madison near the south corner of Monroe and Outer Drive in Dearborn. For ticket information, call (313) 561-7KTS. This production contains adult language and situations; not recommended for preteens.

BY SUE SUCHYTA  
SPECIAL WRITER

The Players Guild of Dearborn's presentation of the musical drama "Blood Brothers" is a captivatingly intense tragedy, full of foreshadowing and foreboding. And while the soundtrack will never be a hit, the songs convey the sadness and futility that unfolds.

Mrs. Johnstone, a struggling cleaning woman with a house full of children, discovers shortly after her husband deserts her that she is pregnant with twins. Her employer, Mrs. Lyons, a wealthy, childless woman, begs her for one of the twins. Since Mrs. Lyons's husband has refused to adopt a baby, but is away on business for extended periods, Mrs. Lyons schemes to pass the baby off as her own. Mrs. Johnstone, who risks losing her children to the welfare authorities, very reluctantly agrees. Thus the twins are separated at birth.

However, the two boys seem inexorably drawn to each other, and become best friends, despite their diverse backgrounds and



Farewell: Eddie (Jeff Ostrowski, right) tells his best friend Mickey (Ron Williams) goodbye as Mrs. Johnstone (Valerie Mould) watches in "Blood Brothers."

their parents' attempts to keep them apart. As they reach adulthood, class differences begin to tear them apart, and the separation of the twins at birth seems to be on a collision course toward fulfillment.

Under the skillful direction of Kim Donovan of Farmington Hills, the strong cast kept the show's pace rapid and suspenseful. The chorus, whose members played multiple roles — from children to adults — added a colorful infusion of characters to the show.

Brian Townsend and Richard Moore's cleverly constructed and versatile set, which facilitated the rapid scene changes, was augmented with drops and easily moved furniture to segue rapidly

from exterior to interior scenes. Valerie Mould of Royal Oak is wonderfully sympathetic as Mrs. Johnstone, whose guilt over the surrender of one of her twins shadows her life. Mould captures both the plucky optimism of a woman determined to care for her children despite heavy odds, and the wrenching grief when she surrenders a twin to Mrs. Lyons. She embodies much of the sadness in her frequent reprises of the character's signature ballad, "Marilyn Monroe."

Emily Trybny effectively portrayed Mrs. Lyons's desperation and descent into mental illness. Haunted by her conscience in the form of the narrator, her character is in song. Doug Clark of Royal Oak, who plays the narrator, has a powerful stage presence and a voice that sends chills

up one's spine. His searing glances, deliberate movements, and menacing voice drove Mrs. Lyons further into her downward spiral.

The twins, Mickey and Eddie, were played respectively by Ron Williams Jr. of Redford and Jeff Ostrowski. Both are talented actors and strong singers. They were wonderfully convincing as 7-year-olds and angst-ridden adolescents. Their wonderful voices were a credit to the less than memorable songs. "That Guy" their duet, tellingly captured the insecurities of awkward 14-year-olds.

However, Williams lost credibility when a prop mishap caused him to break out of character and shake uncontrollably with laughter in a crowd scene freeze meant to accentuate a grim song by the narrator!

Linda, Mickey and Eddie's sidkick, who loved them both in turn, was played with warmth, longing, and passion by Ruthann Hande of Canton. Hande metamorphosed from a convincing tomboy in pigtails to a beautiful, sensuous woman. Her fluid movements and expressive face accentuated her strong stage presence.

The period costuming, from the 1950s to 1970s, was effective and realistic, and added believability to the scenes where adults portrayed children. The properties — especially the symbolic guns — worked well. Make-up crew deserves special recognition for their hairstyles, which effectively portrayed both the age of characters and their states of mind.

# Paula Poundstone performs benefit for Gilda's Club

BY KEELY WYGONIK  
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Gilda's Club of Metro Detroit is "identified with humor," said Geri Lester of Franklin who is treasurer of the board of directors.

That's one of the reasons they chose comedienne Paula Poundstone as the featured performer at Gilda's Big Night Out, Wednesday, May 19 at St. John's Armenian Banquet Center, 22001 Northwestern Highway, Southfield. The event benefits Gilda's Club of Metro Detroit. It begins at 6 p.m. with a silent auction. Dinner, catered by the Golden Mushroom restaurant follows at 7:15 p.m. The program begins at 8 p.m. Gene Taylor of WOMC is the host and emcee. Tickets are \$125 (donor) and \$200 (patron). Corporate tables are available for \$3,000 and benefactor tables for \$5,000. Call (248) 677-0800 for tickets.

"I was a very big fan of hers," said Poundstone about Radner, a Birmingham native and well-known comedienne who died of cancer. "When I was in high school other kids had black-light posters of music groups on their walls — I had pictures of Gilda on my wall along with other comedy greats."

Laughter, they say is the best medicine, and while it isn't a cure, it certainly helps people suffering from cancer and their families.

"I'm a cancer survivor and I know the importance of being with people who experienced the same thing you're going through," said Lester who is one of the honorary chairpersons for Gilda's Big Night Out. "It's important to have something like this outside the hospital facility. It wasn't available when I was going through treatment."

Over 700 people have passed through the doors since Gilda's Club Metro Detroit opened in



Paula Poundstone

Royal Oak last January. Gilda's Club Metro Detroit is a dream come true for Radner who envisioned a warm and welcoming place where people cancer, their friends and family could join with others to build social and emotional support.

Proceeds raised from Gilda's Big Night Out will help Gilda's Club continue its work. Lester is excited about the silent auction. Two rooms are filled with 100 items. "We have beautiful art pieces, a trip, some diamond earrings, dinners and symphony tickets. People have been very generous and kind," she said. "Gilda's Club is open to everyone at no charge. We're here to help people live with cancer and make every day worthwhile."

Poundstone is a frequent guest on the Rosie O'Donnell Show, winner of several CableACE Awards for her HBO comedy specials and is currently the voice of Judge Stone on the ABC Saturday morning program "Squigglevision." She will be starring in a new animated series for UPN "Home Movies" in which she voices the character of Paula Small, a divorced single mom with two children.

# 'Wait Until Dark' has 2nd act thrills

The Plymouth Theatre Guild presents Frederick Knott's suspenseful drama, "Wait Until Dark" 8 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, May 13-15 at the Water Tower Theatre, on the grounds of the Northville Psychiatric Hospital, 4100 West Seven Mile Road, west of I-275 between Haggerty and Northville Roads. Not recommended for children under age 12. Tickets \$9, \$8 advance, call (248) 349-7110. Plymouth Theatre Guild will also be presenting "Wait Until Dark" 6 p.m. Sunday, May 16 at the Southeast Michigan Arts Conservatory, 5710 N. Canton Center Road. Tickets \$8 in advance, \$9 at the door. For more information about this performance, call (734) 397-5417.

BY SUE SUCHYTA  
SPECIAL WRITER

The Plymouth Theatre Guild's presentation of "Wait Until Dark" suffered through a slow moving first act script of redundant exposition before presenting a frightening, fast-paced second act. If the first act were selectively cut, the Guild would have an exciting thriller on their hands.

"Wait Until Dark" is the story

of Susy Hendrix, a blind woman whose photographer husband Sam unwittingly becomes the courier for a doll containing heroin. Sam was given the doll by a fellow plane passenger, who told him the doll was for a hospitalized girl in Sam's home city of Montreal. However, the doll disappears from the Hendrix apartment, and the criminal elements after the heroin become desperate to get it back.

Gloria, Susy's temperamental 10-year-old neighbor, knows where the doll is and becomes Susy's eyes when they must outwit the encroaching criminals.

The play begins with two criminals "casing" the Hendrix's apartment. Knott's script spends way too much time setting up the background, which other characters reiterate again and again. Dennis Hubbell of West Bloomfield as Mike Talman and Barry Levine as Sgt. Carino are the two criminals recently released on parole who are blackmailed into helping mastermind bad guy Harry Root. Levine is a Columbo type, with a rumpled raincoat but without the smarts. Hubbell is suave and charming as Talman, gaining Susy's trust

by claiming to be a friend of her husband, who is away on business.

Arianna Prusak of Novi is wonderful as Susy, mastering the deliberate and searching movements of a blind person, and conveying her character's terror and frustration. Her final battle with the evil Root is wonderfully choreographed and well timed, especially since much of it takes place in dim light or the dark. The scene is very frightening and believable whether played in total darkness or lit only by the refrigerator bulb.

Sara Wiercick of Plymouth plays 10-year-old Gloria, the bratty neighbor who fortunately has a redeeming side to her personality. Sara is wonderful in her tantrum scene when, after being accused by Susy of stealing the doll, she impulsively flings kitchen implements around the room with unbridled enthusiasm.

Keith Prusak, who plays the evil mastermind Root, and who is Arianna's husband in real life, is cast against type as he would be murderer. He conveyed well the bright but twisted criminal mind and times his trump cards well. He has a powerful stage

presence and is like a panther in his dimly lit final battle with Susy.

The set, a living room/kitchen combination, is ugly, bland, and cluttered, with only one poorly stained kitchen cupboard. The props mirror what one would expect to see in a college dorm room, not the home of a successful photographer who would have an eye for color and detail. The house is also unusually cluttered for a blind person who would need strict organization. Why would a photographer with a studio a few blocks away have an open darkroom in his apartment? Especially of lit with a white — not red — bulb. And if the show is set in the present day, why do they have an old dial phone?

Susy's calf-length jeans and loose-fitting shirt are unflattering, and both her outfit and Gloria's are understated, missing an opportunity to add some color to the stage.

# Testimonial honor musician Kazarian

A testimonial dinner for clarinetist Hachig Kazarian will be held beginning at 7 p.m. Saturday, June 26, at the Burton Manor, 27777 Schoolcraft Road, Livonia.

Kazarian will be honored for promoting Armenian music. The program will include hors d'oeuvres, dinner and Armenian music and dance. Tickets are \$50 a person. All proceeds will go to

the Hachig Kazarian Music Scholarship Fund at the Juilliard School of Music in New York City.

There will be several featured speakers and presentations by the Juilliard School of Music, Eastern Michigan University and government officials.

For more information, call George Sarkisian at (248) 626-9137.

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