

THE WEEKEND

FRIDAY



Brooke Andres of Livonia (left) and Denise Kowaleski-Albright of Westland star in the Players Guild of Dearborn production of "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum," 8 p.m. at the theater, 21730 Madison, Dearborn. Tickets \$14, call (313) 561-TKTS.

SATURDAY



Farmington Hills and Farmington celebrate music, dance and visual arts with a free festival that continues through Sunday, May 6 at the Costick Activities Center in Farmington Hills. Gala opening 6:30 p.m. today. Tickets \$25, \$45 a couple. Call (248) 473-1857 for reservations, festival information.

SUNDAY



Paper Bag Productions announces the return of "Snoopy" to the Plymouth Masonic Temple, 730 Penniman. Lunch served 1 p.m. followed by show at 2 p.m. Tickets \$8.50 per person, call (248) 476-8635 or (810) 344-7774 for reservations and information.



Vaudeville GOES LEGIT

PLYMOUTH THEATER GUILD
PRODUCTION NO DOG

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
STAFF WRITER
lchomin@oe.homecomm.net

Cynthia Lewandowski struts across the stage in her Little Bo Peep costume certain that young Kitty Turner won't be able to resist the call of the stage once she hears the opening. Lewandowski and the rest of the vaudevillians desperately need someone to open the show. Maxie, the dog in the Mack and Maxie act, has died and the vaudevillians are trying every trick they know to lure Kitty (played by Mandy Pascas of Plymouth) into singing and dancing a number even though she's never been on stage before. Mademoiselle Yvette, played by Lewandowski of Canton, will stop at nothing. When the song and dance routine doesn't work, she pulls a dog suit out of her trunk and convinces Kitty to try it on. What next?

Keep 'em guessing

Only the audience at the Plymouth Theatre Guild's production of "Vaudeville: A Play with Music" will learn if Kitty will or won't go when the show opens Friday, May 4 at the Water Tower Theatre in Northville.

Set in Philadelphia in 1919, the play was written by Laurence Carr. It premiered at The Attic Theater in Detroit in 1986. "It's a slice of life of vaudevilian people boarding at this time in Kit Turner's house," said director Barbara Bloom who grew up in Farmington Hills. "There's a British singer, an Irish tenor, a Jewish straight man in a comedy team, an African American singer and dance man, each have their story. It's just before the roaring 20s and women still wore the Gibson and corsets. Vaudeville was one of the few arenas where women were equals."

"If I could have picked an era to be born in this was it. You played a week here, a week there. There were different circuits you might travel on. To play the Orpheum in New York was saying to the world I made it."

Interesting music

Music director C.J. Nodus remembers many of the songs from the years he worked as a piano player in a New York Burlesque house. He was 13 and recently arrived from the Soviet Union.

"What's interesting about the music is that it is not all recognizable," said Nodus of Livonia. "By the Beautiful Sea," "Shine on Harvest Moon" and "Hello, My Baby," many generations will remember these but at different times totally obscure songs are thrown in that fit the period. What's interesting with each character he tried to



Hoofin' it: Brian Johnson of Redford plays a song and dance man in "Vaudeville: A Play with Music."

create a signature piece like "Yiddish Cowboy." Many of the roots were Yiddish theater from the turn of the century. You have to remember the past to understand what you're doing now. Vaudeville is the roots of musical theater. There are definite lines of continuation. Jack Benny, Bob Hope, George Burns and Gracie Allen were all vaudeville comedians.

"But it's a play as opposed to a musical, or a vaudeville show with the routines and patter. This is the back stage. This is a vaudeville house where they lived."

Like Bloom, Barbara Mathers loves the era. The Walled Lake resident plays Kit Turner, owner of the boarding house and mother of 16-year-old Kitty.

"I love it because it's a period piece," said Mathers who's worked with the Rosedale Community Players for 23 years. "It can teach us about where theater came from. The whole show from beginning to end is fun."

There won't be a dry eye in the place, though, when Jim Christensen takes the stage as Mack Maxwell. This is only the third production for the Livonia resident who's been offstage for 35 years.

"Mack is in his 60s and of Eastern European background," said Christensen. "His dog has been his partner for 15 years and he dies in the second act. It's the first time I've ever had an emotional

Plymouth Theatre Guild
What: Presents "Vaudeville: A Play with Music"
When: 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, May 4-5, 11-12 and 18-19, and 6 p.m. Sunday, May 13
Where: Water Tower Theatre on the campus of Northville Psychiatric Hospital, 41001 W. Seven Mile Road, west of Wagoner
Tickets: \$10, \$7 ages 18 and under, call (248) 345-7310

Please see VAUDEVILLE, B2

Specialty act: Toby Booker tries to corral Kitty (played by Mandy Pascas of Plymouth) into opening the vaudeville show dressed as a dog.



Flashy footwork: Cynthia Lewandowski (left) shows Mandy Pascas a few simple steps for entertaining an audience.

MUSICAL

'Phantom' characters take off masks to talk about show

BY KEELY WYGONIK
STAFF WRITER
kwygonik@oe.homecomm.net

When Rebecca Pitcher first heard the music from "The Phantom of the Opera" she fell in love with the Phantom not Raoul.

"Why is Christine in love with Raoul. I thought he was a weenie," said Pitcher, who portrays Christine in the touring production of "The Phantom of the Opera" now playing at the Masonic Temple Theatre in Detroit.

To her the Phantom seemed more masculine, more romantic. But after she saw the show, Pitcher saw his dark side and understood why Christine falls in love with Raoul.

She's happy with her leading man. "John Cudia who plays Raoul is very attractive, and has a beautiful voice," said Pitcher. "He brings a lot of energy to the role."

First impressions

Talking about first impressions is fun. Can you imagine making your living as Christine or the Phantom?

"He's just a nice man to work with," said Pitcher recalling the moment the Phantom, portrayed by Ted Keegan, grabbed her from behind for a hug. "Here he was just wearing shorts and full

make-up." The man whom the audience perceives as a mysterious, dark, romantic character has a real face behind that mask.
"Ted's great," said Pitcher. "All the Phantoms I've worked with have been cool. They're not snotty, Broadway people."
Keegan has portrayed the Phantom both on Broadway and with the touring company of Andrew Lloyd Webber's "The Phantom of the Opera."
"It's a great role to do," he said. "He's not just a mean person, or just mad. He goes from A to Z. You have to play so many emotions. I have a great time doing it, I'm having a blast with the role."
"The Phantom of the Opera," based on Gaston Leroux's novel "Le Fantôme de l'Opéra," tells the

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Please see PHANTOM, B2



Starring role: Ted Keegan as the Phantom in a scene from the national touring company of Andrew Lloyd Webber's "The Phantom of the Opera."

JOAN MARCUS