

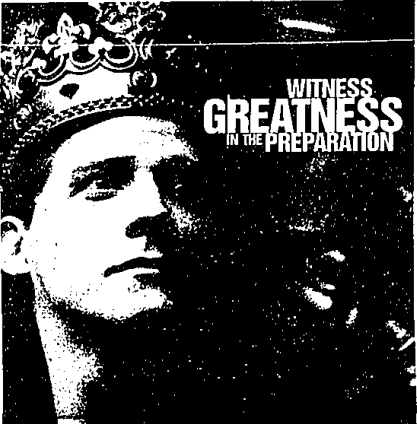
Theater from page B1

all-time, all-time favorite, favorite plays, don't get me wrong. (But) it's five guys in a deer camp with beer and farts and some spiritual-ity thrown in. 'Tropical Pickle' was just a broad crazy farce," Sanville explained.

"I Love You" and "Shear Madness" were very broad comedies. For all intents and purposes, "Dinner With Friends" is a straight play. I spend most of my time in the not-for-profit world. This is a commercial venture. Art is great and we want to do the best possible show. But we're talking about thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars of the Forbes' money that they're putting into this thing. They're in it to make money and it's a hell of a risk."

"Dinner With Friends" -- which HBO made into a movie starring Dennis Quaid, Greg Kinnear, Andie MacDowell and Toni Collette -- is Sanville's second production with the Gem. He also directed "Tropical Pickle" and "Escanaba in da Moonlight."

Sanville spends his day as the artistic director of Daniels' Purple Rose Theater in Chelsea. His duties include acting, directing, writing and producing.



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Gratham Abbey as Henry V  
Photo by Chris McRae



On stage: "Dinner With Friends" stars (Left to right) John Lepard, Barbara Coven, Michelle Mountain and Phil Powers.

So much so that Jim Forbes insisted on using local actors instead of bringing folks in from New York.

"The fact that he went with local talent with this is huge. Everybody in this show lives an hour away from the theater, max. He could have brought in a star. I don't think the show would have been any better, honestly. Another gutsy move is hiring a local group to do that."

Sanville and Forbes cast the play which includes East Lansing

Sunshine from page B1

Gershwin got his start in show biz as a night club impressionist. He began doing theater at age 25, then earned the role of The Riddler in the *Batman* television series. Gershwin says he doesn't mind that the public knows him mostly from the villainous role because "that's the power of TV" -- just so long as they remember him.

Both have fond memories of Detroit even though Gershwin jokes that it's not exactly known as a destination city. Van Patten first played the Cass Theater in 1946. Gershwin used to play the Top Hat Club in Windsor and DB's night club in the Hyatt Regency regularly. He also played Captain Hook in *Peter Pan* at Masonic Auditorium.

Now they're back in Detroit to open a national tour of *The Sunshine Boys*.

"After we leave here we'll be on the road for 7 months doing 80 to 90 cities, mostly one nighters," said Van Patten who went up to Lake St. Clair for an afternoon of relaxation after rehearsing 8 hours a day for six days straight.

So how do they keep up their energy level? Van Patten plays tennis. For Gershwin "it's love for the art." But for Van Patten it's also subject matter.

"I saw the tail end of Vaudeville. There was great talent. Milton Berle is a friend of mine and tells me about it. It cost \$10 a week for room and board and meals. I'm sorry to see it go. There'll never be anything quite like it again."

Director Curt Wollan thinks the audience will love taking a trip back to Vaudeville because of the seasoned characters playing Lewis and Clark.

"It's a lot of fun," said Wollan. "They're very talented. I just love having lunch with them, listening to stories they have about the business. It is amazing the way they play off each other. They're hysterical. There's so much history together too because they know everybody."

Van Patten's son James agrees with Wollan about the veteran acting team. James plays the

**'It's terrific. They're the best. I don't think anybody will get laughs the way they get laughs. These roles were written for them.'**

James Van Patten  
Son of actor Dick Van Patten

nephew who convinces Lewis and Clark to come together for one final performance. Walter Matthau and George Burns played the roles in the movie released in 1975. Tony Randall and Jack Klugman revived the crabby characters on Broadway in 1997.

"It's terrific," said James Van Patten. "They're the best. I don't think anybody will get laughs the way they get laughs. These roles were written for them."

Barry ZeVan hopes he never has to take on the roles even though he's understudying both parts. ZeVan plays the patient in the doctor and tax examination sketch.


"I have 10 lines on my own and 1,400 to memorize of theirs," said ZeVan. "But there's no prima donna atmosphere."

Like Van Patten and Gershwin, ZeVan is excited to be back in Detroit. He made lot of friends here while employed as a weatherman for channels 2 and 4 from 1978 to 1983.


"I love Detroit. It's an exciting city," said ZeVan. "You have the Great Lakes and right across the river is Canada, another country."

Van Patten's back on the set now strolling back and forth as he waits for Gershwin's arrival. Then it's time to take it from the top of Act II.

The lines start flying back and forth, and after every one laughter erupts from the cast, production staff and one lucky visitor.



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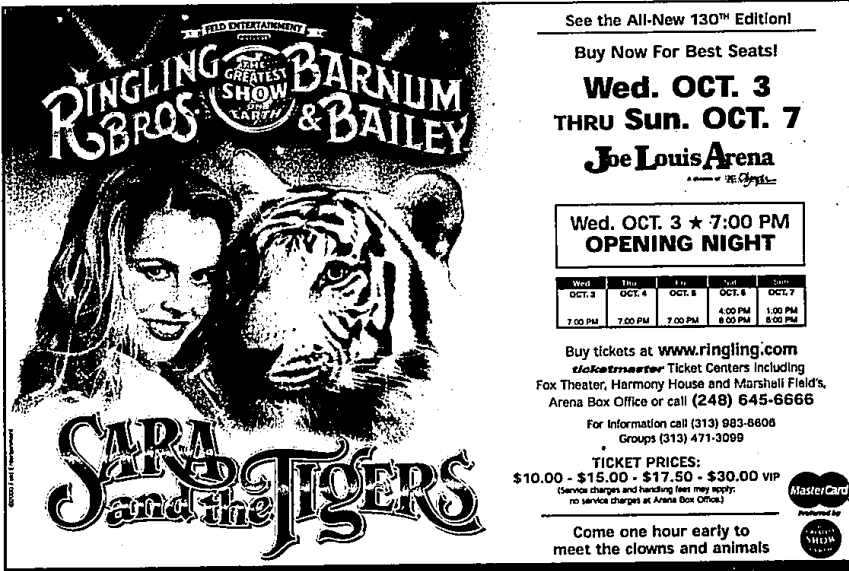
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