

ARTISTIC EXPRESSIONS



LINDA ANN CHOMIN

Theater troupe springs onto the stage with classic comedy

Jerry Nehs has never acted, but that isn't stopping him from taking on the role of the psychiatrist in *Harvey*, Mary Chase's classic comedy about an eccentric gentleman whose best friend is a 6-foot-tall rabbit. Nehs only previous theater experience was encouraging and watching his students perform in productions in Livonia Public Schools.

Nehs seems at ease with playing Dr. Chumley — well, as ease as any first time actor can be — that is until he sees *Harvey* the rabbit.

"My biggest challenge is knowing when my cue is, but it's been a really fun experience," said Nehs, who retired from his position as principal at Hayes Elementary after 32 years in the Livonia Public School system.

What: Parlor Theatre Productions present *Harvey*
When: 3 p.m. and 8 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 20
Where: Novi Hilton, Haggerty and Eight Mile
Tickets: \$10. Call (248) 449-6540

The Parlor Theatre

production takes to the stage of the Novi Hilton Saturday, Oct. 20, for two performances.

"As a teacher I used to put on plays all the time," said Nehs, an adjunct professor at Madonna University. "I felt it was important for students to perform if they wanted to."

In character

Gene Kerwin could probably play the role of Judge Gaffney with his eyes closed. The Farmington Hills resident spent many years on the other side of the bench as an attorney for Chrysler and even though retired continues to practice law with a Livonia firm part-time. He's also experienced as an actor, having performed with the North Roseville Park Players, Roseville Community Players and Northville Players.

Judge Gaffney plots to commit Elwood P. Dowd, the kindly gent with the rabbit friend.

"You spend so much time being yourself, it's nice being someone else," said Kerwin. "The judge is the voice of reason that tries to sort things out. He's the only sane one in the group. The play's really about life the way you'd like it to be. Elwood (played by Robert Closson of Detroit) lives in his own special world."

As Elwood's sister, Jeannine Mende is about to find out what that world is all about. She is on the plot with Kerwin to confine Elwood to Chumley's Rest Home. Then she sees the rabbit and is committed instead.

"I love my part. I'm a ham," said Mende, who founded Parlor Theatre Productions with her husband and director, Ed, nine years ago.

"*Harvey* is an old chestnut," added Ed Mende, a former Plymouth resi-

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Classic comedy: Gene Kerwin (left), Jeannine Mende and Ed Mende plot to commit Elwood P. Dowd, an eccentric gentleman whose best friend is a six-foot-tall rabbit named Harvey.

ALIVE WITH Musical Color



STAFF PHOTO BY ELIZABETH CARLISLE

Season opener: The Plymouth Symphony Orchestra rehearses Mozart's *Overture to The Marriage of Figaro*.

Plymouth Symphony opens season with 'The Red Violin'

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
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Nan Washburn's reserved demeanor and tiredness fades as she begins talking about Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. She programmed the powerful choral piece as a finale for the Plymouth Symphony Orchestra's 2001-2002 season. Washburn begins and ends the 66th year with 18th century classical masters.

Mozart's joyful *Overture to his opera The Marriage of Figaro* opens the season that spotlights a rainbow of musical color Saturday, Oct. 13, at Our Lady of Good Counsel Catholic Church in Plymouth Township.

It's been a busy month for Washburn who returned from guest conducting the Wyoming Symphony Orchestra on Sunday only to

rehearse the Plymouth Symphony Orchestra 24 hours later. Two weeks earlier she traveled to California to conduct the West Hollywood Orchestra.

"Beethoven's Ninth is the highlight of the season," said Washburn before the first rehearsal of the Plymouth Symphony Orchestra season. Washburn is entering her third season as conductor of the orchestra. "It's been quite a few years since the orchestra has done it. It's a wonderful celebration to do such a big piece."

"But I'm also excited about featuring concertmaster Julianna Athyde in Corigliano's *Red Violin* for the first concert. Julianna's a phenomenal talent. The violinist who was to solo with the Wyoming Symphony cut her finger so I called Julianna. In two days she had the whole thing memorized and flew out. Every concert is really exciting."

Washburn's programming promises another stimulating season for audiences. Little known repertoire such as Dame Ethel Smyth's *Overture to the Wreckers* (Oct. 13) and Lecocq's *Rhapsodie Noire for Piano and Orchestra* (Nov. 10) offer the opportunity to experience music from around the world. An English suffragette composer, Smyth wrote *Overture to the Wreckers* in a lush, romantic style for full orchestra.

Lecocq's rhapsody is part of a Latin American program featuring music by Alice Gomez and Gershwin, who was inspired by a trip to Cuba.

Gomez is one of three conductors, including Hilary Tanna, who will work with the orchestra before per-

formances of their music. While in town Gomez will also give a drum workshop at Native West 1-4 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 10. A percussionist, Gomez will demonstrate different drumming techniques. For more information or to register, call Annette Horn at Native West (734) 455-8838.

Michael Daugherty, Detroit Symphony Orchestra composer-in-residence and a professor of composition at the University of Michigan School of Music, will be in attendance for his *Red Cape Tango* from the *Metropolis Symphony* Feb. 16. The tango is part of an all American program for-

ture Copland's *A Lincoln Portrait*. The concert is in conjunction with month-long festivities to celebrate installation of a permanent Lincoln exhibit at the Plymouth Historical Museum. The Plymouth Canton Educational Park Middle School String Orchestra, under the direction of Catherine DePentu and Erin Zurbuchen, will join the orchestra and narrator John Stewart for the program.

"We brought in three composers last year and wanted to bring in

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At work: Nan Washburn begins her third season as conductor of the Plymouth Symphony Orchestra.



At work: Nan Washburn begins her third season as conductor of the Plymouth Symphony Orchestra.

OPERA

Local 'Carmen' holds international talent

BY ALICE RIEN
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Intermittent sniffles clouded Irina Mishura's melodious voice into last month as she was preparing to rehearse *Carmen*, which has become a signature role for the Bloomfield Hills mezzo soprano.

Mishura was nursing a cold and taking it easy on her day off—a rarity in itself this past year.

In addition to making a triumphant debut with the Metropolitan Opera in *Samson and Delilah* opposite Placido Domingo, she also performed with Luciano Pavarotti in *Aida* when he was at the Detroit Opera House.

"I think he was impressed because he invited me back to his hometown in Italy for the 40th anniversary of his opera career, and I sang with Jose Carreras," said Mishura. "I sang with all three tenors in the past year."

But from Oct. 13-21, the Russian

What: The Michigan Opera Theatre presents Bizet's *Carmen*
Where: The Detroit Opera House, 1528 Broadway, Detroit
When: 8 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 13, Wednesday, Oct. 17, and Friday and Saturday, Oct. 19-20. 2 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 14 and 21.
Information: (313) 237-5150

native will be performing a role that many opera critics concede she owns.

Carmen, that voluptuous gypsy from Georges Bizet's opera, is a role that Mishura has performed at the Met and in San Francisco, Miami, Baltimore, Vienna, Munich and in Detroit in 1996.

"People ask if I ever get bored of playing the same role and I say 'Never.' It only gets more and more beautiful and interesting," she said. "I'm changing, my *Carmen* is changing. It's never the same performance twice."

But Mishura, like everyone else in

the nation, is still grappling with what role the arts can fill in a country still mourning from the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

"My mom died on opening night in 1996, and I knew I had to perform," said Mishura. "This is so much deeper and painful. It's almost easier to take the personal loss."

But in these troubling times, Mishura said she's found music to be a healing salve. "It helps people — not to forget — but to soothe, and Bizet's music is beautiful."

Indeed, even those without a penchant for opera are able to hum the *Habanera* and the *Torador Song* — they're practically folk music.

Performed in French with English surtitle translation, this production of *Carmen* also features Nicole Poland in the role of Micaela, tenor Hugh Smith and Gerard Powers alternating as Don



Femme fatale: The Michigan Opera Theatre presents Bizet's *Carmen* Oct. 13-21.

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