The Fisher Theatre celebrates 40 years

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO SPECIAL WRITER

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With its perfect acoustics and
cloquent design, there is no
there venue like the Fisher Thoattree to Harry Nederlander.
"I think it's a building that will
probably never be repeated,"
said Nederlander, 84, whose
family company, Nederlander
Co., runs the Fisher.
"It's so lavish and so beautiful
and so fine. Today, I think the
cost of putting that building up
would be totally prohibited, Just
look at the work in the lobbles."
Plenty of Detroiters have
stared in awe at the lobbles and
the magnificent architecture of
the building on their way to an
evening of theater.
The gem of the Detroit theater
scene is currently celebrating its
40th anniversary.
In hanor of the birthday, the
Nederlander Co. and Wayne
State University created the
"Apple Award" a prize that will
be awarded annually to a nationally recognized theater professional who has made significant
contributions in his or her field.
This year, the inaugural "Apple
Award" - \$10,000 and a crystal
apple - will be presented to playwright Noil Simon at a black-tie
gola in the spring. The award
presentation was to occur Tuesday-Wednesday, Nov. 27-28, but
has been postponed because
Simon is recovering from back
surgery. A new date will be

has been postponed because Simon is recovering from back surgery. A new date will be announced soon.

I think we've tried to judge people as we see them and out of the group we came up with a winner, 'Nederlander said about the decision to honor Simon.' It wasn't just a single shot to get some body some publicity. It's very worthwhile.'

In a press release, WSU President Irvin D. Reid echoed that sentiment.

sentiment.

"Wayne State University is extremely pleased that a professional of Mr. Simon's stature will be the first recipient of the Apple Award. This is an exceptional opportunity for our students to interact with a nationally renowned theater professional who has devoted much of his life to the arts.

Simon's resume reads like a flest of Broadway - Barefoot in the Park, The Odd Couple, Plaza Suite, Last of the Red Hot Lovers, The Sunshine Boys, Chapter Two, Biloxi Blues, Lost in Yonkers, The Goodbye Girl among others.

The award was named after Nederlander's mother, Sarah Applebaum Nederlander, who was affectionately known as "Apple."

"The biggest kick I get out of it is the memory of my mother. That's where the 'Apple' came from. She had a lot to do with the business, keeping things together. Nothing runs 100 percent all the time,' he said.

The Fisher also marks its anniversary with a cleaning, now wallpaper, carpeting and air conditioning. It's 40th season kicked off in September with The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas. It winds up in May with the Pulltzer Prize-winning drama Proof.

Long history

The Fisher Theatre was designed as a 3,500-seat movie and vaudwille theater. Opening Nov. 11, 1928, it featured 'Mexican-Indian art, bannan trees, a goldfish pond and wandering macaws that audience members fed by hand," according to the Fisher's official history. It closed in December 1960.

The theater re-opened Oct. 1, 1961 after a \$3.5 million faceliff with a little more than 2,000 seats for theater-geores. David Tobias (Dr.). Nederlander, son of a Detroit eigar maker, bogan mannanging and booking productions, as he had done for the nearby Detroit Opera and Lynn Redgrave have performed on the Floof. Sweet Charrity and Golden Boy.

"There have been some great shows," said Alan Lichtenstein, executive director of the Nederlander Co., which also operates the Masonic Temple Theatre. "Madame Butterfly and Angels in Amarica were really spectacular shows. Certainly, Les Miserables was spectacular, The first time

an enormous success. I really enjoyed Stomp. We were the first city in the country that played Stomp for a week. That was a pretty exciting moment."

Lichtenstein, who has worked at the Fisher since Jan. 1, 1981, is responsible for booking the productions that visit the theater each season. He calls it a "fun" job and somewhat of a challenge.

Every year it's a little different. We try to find the best package of shows every season and determine how to market them. That's the fun part. Every show is a little different. It's nice to keep the lights on in Detroit, It's a great theater. The shows look good in there, "Lichtenstein said.

The "quiet" theater scene in Detroit has allowed the Fisher to host several openings. "Shows

can open very quietly in Detroit as opposed to all your eyes on San Francisco or Boston. They can work in peace and get a show."

Lichtenstein is just as in love with the Fisher as Nederlander is. When speaking about the venue, he sounds like a proud father talking about his child.

"It's just the intimacy and the acoustics. The shows sound good in there. Plus, there's not a bad sent in the house."

It's so lavish and so beautiful and so fine. Today, I think the cost of putting that building up would be totally prohibited. Just look at the work in the lobbies.'

Harry Nederlander

—Fischer Theatre





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