

ARTISTIC EXPRESSIONS



LINDA CHOMIN

Children's art draws on Bible stories

Southfield reader Ann Barnett's excitement over a children's art exhibit was so contagious I knew I had to visit the Janice Charach Epstein Gallery in the Jewish Community Center in West Bloomfield before the display ended Feb. 28.

It's difficult for me to see all the exhibits on display around town. When I first started covering the arts for the *Observer & Eccentric Newspapers* more than 11 years ago, there weren't as many venues. Now there are more than I could ever possibly hope to cover. That's why I appreciate phone calls and letters from readers like Barnett, a retired psychotherapist and teacher.

Barnett first called, then wrote, about a drawing by Ullas Thomas, an 11-year old girl from India who created whimsical reindeer, a giraffe and a mallard duck emerging from Noah's Ark.

The theme was one of the most popular among 800,000 children who

Janice Charach
Epstein Gallery

What: Present
Children of the
World Illustrate
the Bible

When: Through
Thursday, Feb. 28.
Hours are 11 a.m.
to 6 p.m. Monday-
Wednesday, 10
a.m. to 7 p.m.
Thursday, and 11
a.m. to 4 p.m.
Sunday

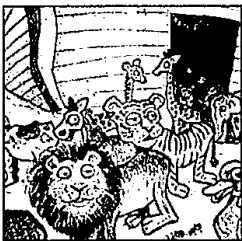
Where: At the
gallery inside the
Jewish Community
Center, 6600 W.
Maple at Drake,
West Bloomfield.
Call (248) 432-
5448

chose not to participate due to the religious element of the competition.

"To be able to create is the most important part of a child's development," said Barnett, who at one time was employed as a social worker in Detroit and Birmingham schools. It was there she used art as a tool.

Bright blues and greens, an orange whale swallowing Jonah, the colors and images tell the story. I love children's art. It's always so colorful and creative.

Please see CHOMIN, B2



Children's art: Ullas Thomas's drawing is one of the works on exhibit at the Janice Charach Epstein Gallery.

Village Players

2002-2003 productions

- *Jekyll & Hyde, The Musical*
By Leslie Bricusse and Frank Wildhorn
Oct. 11-13, Oct. 18-20, and Oct. 25-26
- *The Heidi Chronicles*
By Wendy Wasserstein
Dec. 6-8, Dec. 13-15
- *The Fantasticks*
By Tom Jones and Harvey Schmidt
Jan. 24-26 and 31, Feb. 1-2, Feb. 7-8
- *Cyrano De Bergerac*
By Edmond Rostand
March 14-16, March 21-23
- *Side Show*
By Bill Russell and Henry Krieger
May 2-4, May 9-11, May 16-17
Call: (248) 644-2075 for information



BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
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Evelyn Orbach and the rest of *The Laramie Project* cast seem eager to hear every last detail Jeffrey Montgomery reveals about the murder of Matthew Shepard.

A hate crime is a hate crime no matter the ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation of the victim, but this one hit close to home for the executive director of the Triangle Foundation, a gay rights organization providing services for victims and survivors of hate crimes.

Montgomery was there in Laramie, Wyo. immediately after Shepard was brutally beaten then tied to a fence post and left to die. He was there for the trial of Aaron McKinney, one of the two murderers. Russell Henderson pleaded guilty to avoid the death penalty. Who better than Montgomery to educate the Jewish Ensemble Theatre cast as they prepare to perform *The Laramie Project* Feb. 20 to March 24 in the Aaron DeRoy Theatre in West Bloomfield?

As artistic director, Orbach always strives to present professional productions but this play is special. It's part of a season devoted to stopping hate wherever it happens.

"What playwright Moises Kaufman and the Tectonic Theater Project have done is give you a sense of what the people of Laramie went through," said Orbach. "The point is this was a university town surrounded by ranches, an agricultural community. What happened in Laramie is even more scary because the people are like people anywhere."

"You begin to garner the different perspectives that people right here in West Bloomfield, Southfield or Dearborn might have as well. It comes down to two kids murdered another kid, the idea that this person is gay and it's all right. It's a hate crime."

Kaufman and the Tectonic Theater Project spent 18-months interviewing 200 residents of Laramie before committing words to paper. Orbach plays several of the townspeople including a rancher, a woman whose daughter cut Matthew Shepard off the fence, a Baptist minister, wife of a patrolman, and a doctor.

Moments

"It is a truly unique treatment," said Orbach.



STAFF PHOTOS BY TOM HUSTMEYER

Hate crime: Kelly Pino of Plymouth, and the rest of the cast, rehearse the funeral scene in their upcoming production of *The Laramie Project*.

"Instead of breaking it up into scenes, Moises breaks it up into moments. It's the closest it comes to a docudrama. The names and information are real. It brings an audience an experience you don't get from a news reel. It brings things you don't get from a drama. It brings attention to the issue that

The Laramie Project

What: Jewish Ensemble Theatre presents the Michigan premiere of the play about the brutal murder of Matthew Shepard, a young gay college student

When: Opens Wednesday, Feb. 20 and continues to Sunday, March 24. Curtain 2 p.m. Sunday and Wednesday, March 13, 7:30 p.m. Wednesday-Thursday and Sunday, 8 p.m. Saturday, one evening performance March 13

Where: In the Aaron DeRoy Theatre, lower level of the Jewish Community Center, 6600 W. Maple at Drake, West Bloomfield

Tickets: \$16-\$28 with discounts available for seniors/students. Call (248) 788-2900

Benefit performance: 7:30 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 24. Tickets \$40, includes an afterglow with cast. Proceeds go to the Triangle Foundation



Firsthand knowledge: Jeffrey Montgomery, executive director of the Triangle Foundation (left), talks with the cast and director about the details of Matthew Shepard's murder.

no matter what your religion or sexual orientation, it's about people's right to live.

"Matthew Shepard was 5-foot 2-inches tall and weighed 105 pounds and they beat him mercilessly. If we're going to stop hate we've got to find where it happens and snuff it out. We have to make the alien not alien anymore. We have to take the strangeness out of the stranger."

Kelly Pino agrees wholeheartedly with Orbach that something has to be done to stop hate crimes. The Plymouth resident plays the role of the first officer on the scene, Reggie Fluty, a 39-year-old mother of two. The experience opened Pino's eyes. She wasn't ready to read the script telling about the condition of Shepard when found. She was sheltered from violence, spending her early years as a student at Kingswood School in Bloomfield Hills and later Birmingham Groves High School before graduating from the American Academy of Dramatic Art in New York City.

"She discovered the young boy," said Pino, who's performed with Meadow Brook Theatre, Performance Network in Ann Arbor and Detroit Repertory Theatre. "The things I have to describe are very hard to describe. You don't want to visualize. There was an overwhelming amount of blood on the scene. She owns llamas and was building a pen and had lots of cuts on her hands. She tried to do mouth-to-mouth. There were no gloves because the sheriff was too cheap and then found out the next day Matthew Shepard had HIV and she was the one trying to cut him down. So she went through an agony of her own just wondering if she would develop AIDS."

"It's very moving. You're just a sheriff in Laramie, Wyo. If I had seen something like that I'd be crying for years. She's a police officer and can't cry."

Insight

Director Pat Ansuini knows first hand the cruelty to gays, lesbians, bi-sexuals and transgenders face. That's why she's doing everything she can to make this powerful play a success.

"I come at it from the point of view as a lesbian," said Ansuini of Royal Oak. "I can provide a certain insight. When I came out it was a dark world. Now the tolerance in some cases, in some areas of the

Please see JET, B2

MILESTONE

Village Players raise the curtain on its 80th season

BY KEELY KALESKI WYAGONIK
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There's a lot of drama in turning 80, yet the Village Players chose a low-key celebration to announce its 80th anniversary season.

"We're trying to get ahead of the curve, and we've got challenging shows," said Gregg Watkins, president elect of the Village Players of Birmingham during the launch party at Big Rock Chop & Steak House in Birmingham. "We

wanted to give the directors as much time as possible to put together the shows. I'm biased, but I think it's a great slate."

Theatergoers can look forward to *Jekyll & Hyde, The Musical, The Heidi Chronicles, The Fantasticks, Cyrano De Bergerac, and Side Show*.

Being involved in the Village Players is a "family thing" for Watkins. "Everyone here has this shared interest in the arts and theater. It's exhilarating, my kids are theater rats. You meet a great

array of talented people."

Sharon Jordan, president of Village Players, shares Watkins' enthusiasm. She's been involved for the past 10 years.

"I really like these people, it's become a passion. We are the oldest continuous running community theater in the country."

Husband and wife Beverly and John Dickenson have the awesome task of directing the season opener - *Jekyll & Hyde, The Musical*. Beverly will direct

the show, and John will take care of the musical direction. "It's a challenging play," she said. "I was attracted to the newness of it. We wanted to do this show. It has an emotional tug, and is very dramatic."

Jay Kaplan is introducing Village Players audiences to *Side Show*, a musical that follows the story of Siamese twins Violet and Daisy Hilton from a side show to their triumph as vaudeville stars. "It's my all time

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