



DAN ALPERT

Revealed: A Great place to live

The race is on. In less than four years, the Detroit area will host the Super Bowl. Every available dollar will be spent to project an image of vitality, excitement and friendliness to the world and to showcase our region's most positive offerings.

Yet even now, the Detroit area's cultural organizations present a welcoming, first class impression of our region. If a major sporting event is considered an effective way to sell the nation on Detroit, can't the attention of television to those bustling Friday nights at the Detroit Institute of Arts or Cranbrook or to the national treasures located right in the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village do the same?

It is our cultural organizations that have the greatest ongoing ability to tell our story and showcase what is unique about us. Since the mid-1990s, Detroit Public Television has been a member of the coalition of cultural institutions that are dedicated to making their attractions more accessible and enjoyable.

Our major contributions during that time have included specials with the DSO, the DIA and coverage of hundreds of musicians, arts and cultural groups and artists of all kinds on *Backstage Pass*, a timely weekly series that showcased the local arts scene, entertaining viewers and encouraging them to enrich their lives by attending area showings.

For five years, the program turned Detroit Public Television into a welcoming center for performances by top local and national acts in the performing and visual arts. Then last fall came the economic slump and the difficult decision by funding sources to discontinue support, along with the resulting reality that production of *Backstage Pass* must be suspended.

We, along with the worthy arts organizations that received major exposure on the show, hope that in some form we can make local arts and culture a focus again. However, that cannot happen without stable, long-term funding. Despite the "public" in our name, less than 10 percent of Detroit Public Television's annual revenue comes from federal government funding. Unlike other PBS stations, we receive no operating or capital funding from the state, county, city or any university.

One of the positive outcomes of the proposed regional arts tax is that if it were adopted, Detroit Public Television would dedicate the resulting revenue to local productions, including coverage of the region's arts and cultural offerings. With a million local families a week tuning in to Detroit Public Television - twice as many as watched us 20 years ago - and another million across Canada who watch us weekly, we can be a huge megaphone for the good things going on in southeast Michigan.

The letters and comments we have from cultural institutions that thanked us for jumps in attendance after we featured them on *Backstage Pass* shows the value of our station in building what Dr. Bill Anderson, Michigan's director of the Department of History, Arts and Libraries, refers to as "cultural tourism."

Despite the pressures of corporate

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Farmington Players act up on and off stage

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN

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The jester isn't the only one fooling around in the Farmington Players production of *Once Upon a Mattress*. Minutes before rehearsal begins the cast and co-producers exchange barbs.

This is Lisa Muscio's first time directing and she's wasting no time telling her mother Jan Salisbury what to do. Her father Bill as co-producer of the show gets equal time.

"It's actually quite fun. I'm having a good time," said Muscio who's done everything from musical comedy to drama with the Farmington Players over the last 14 years. Muscio minored in theater at Michigan State University after acting in productions at North Farmington High School.

"The biggest challenge is coordinating 20 schedules and the acting, dancing and music. It's a big cast with 19 members, 9 main characters and myself as director. Carol Burnett played the role of the Princess on Broadway in 1959. It was difficult trying to find the perfect princess for the prince who the queen doesn't want to marry."

Not to worry. Rita Montpetit will have them rolling in the aisles when



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BRISLER

Love story: Prince Dauntless (Tony Castellani) and Princess Winifred (Rita Montpetit) fall in love in the Farmington Players production opening Friday, May 3.

the comedy opens Friday, May 3, in the theater at Barnes & Noble Booksellers in West Bloomfield. The Rochester Hills resident even resembles Burnett in this take-off on the fairy tale about the Princess and the Pea.

"I get compared to Carol Burnett a lot," said Montpetit. "Playing Princess Winifred is just a fun role, a dream role because the character and myself have no inhibitions. It's very carefree, kooky, zany, bawdy and naughty."

Tony Castellani plays the Prince trying to win over the scatterbrained Winifred. Acting is a change of pace for Castellani who directs the drama program at East Hills Middle School in Bloomfield Hills and the senior division of Cranbrook Theatre School during the summer.

"Theater is a wonderful addiction. I love directing kids, exposing them to theater. I'm not a frustrated actor while directing," said Castellani who played the same role with Ridgedale Players last October. "I enjoy playing Prince Dauntless, who's attempting to

become a man and his mom's not letting him grow up. Queen Aggravain (Jan Salisbury) tests all of the prospective females and finds every reason why they're not good enough.

"It's a musical I think kids would really love, a fairy tale complete with comedy, enchantment, and a cornucopia of talent."

Tim Belanger, like Castellani, played the same role in *Once Upon a Mattress* before.

Nearly 25 years ago, the South Lyon resident became Sir Harry the Knight in a production at Livonia Bentley High School.

"My character is arrogant, pompous, and takes it upon himself to find a princess because his amour, Lady Larkin (Jan Forhan), is in a family way and no one can marry until the Prince does," said Belanger. "I love the singing and dancing. I just hope I'll be able to sing when the show opens. I got laryngitis two weeks ago and

Once Upon a Mattress

What: Farmington Players perform the comedy musical based on the fairy tale, *The Princess and the Pea*

When: 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, May 3-4, 10-11 and Thursday-Saturday, May 16-18 and May 30-June 1, and 2 p.m. Sunday, May 5, 12 and 19 and Saturday, June 1

Where: West Bloomfield Civic Theater inside Barnes & Noble Booksellers, 6800 Orchard Lake Road, between 14 and 15 Mile

Tickets: \$15, half off for Mothers on Sunday, May 12 and children 2 p.m. Saturday, June 1. Call (248) 219-0800

only now am I starting to sing again."

Sing or not, the show will go on with The Jester (Darryl Ziegelman), Minstrel (Tim Timmer) and a mute King (Chuck Fisher) trying to further a plot to foil the Queen's plan to keep the Prince all to herself.

"I thought it was going to be easy but mine is not easy, said Fisher of Birmingham. "The King's mope because of a nasty spell. It's

not easy miming and chasing the daisies through the castle." The Queen doesn't find that amusing and isn't shy about showing it. She yells at the top of her voice throughout most of the show. Still Salisbury is having a good time because she gets to spend time with her daughter the director.

"I always wondered what it would be like to be directed by my daughter," said Salisbury. "I respect her opinion. She came up with good ideas and made us very proud. We're on the same wave length."

Albeit a little kooky.



Enchanting spoof: Jan Salisbury plays Queen Aggravain in a take-off on the fairy tale *The Princess and the Pea*. Princess Winifred (Rita Montpetit), Lady Giselle (Marcia Peterson), Lady Lucille (Lindsay Colangelo), Lady Merrill (Crystal Gibbons).



attempting to

FESTIVAL



STAFF PHOTO BY TOM HOFFMAN

Fancy stepping: Dance instructor Laurie Davis joins in with her dance group during a rehearsal at FAR Conservatory in Birmingham.

Collaboration leads to performance extravaganza

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN

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Birmingham music therapist Margaret Hull seems breathless after walking in the door from a meeting with Livonia Mall management. She and the rest of the Southeast Region Committee of VSA arts of Michigan have been working to bring more than 225 children and adult performers with disabilities to the mall for their annual festival Friday-Saturday, May 3-4.

As if worrying about having enough buses with wheelchair lifts isn't enough, Hull is busy reminding Pontiac school

teachers the festival location changed. The committee couldn't be happier that it did. The switch led to a collaboration with the Livonia Mall and Farmington Musicals to Celebrate the Arts with dozens of performances May 3-13.

One last detail to work out though - Hull needs to rearrange the delivery time for a piano from Hammill Music so it arrives after her 80 special education students from Pontiac schools sing. The students from Pontiac Northern High School and Washington and Madison Middle schools began rehearsing together six weeks ago after the vocal groups individually prepared the songs in anticipation of the annual festival.

"It's a good experience for them to be with that number of students," said Hull who serves on VSA's Southeast Region Committee. "Our theme this year is *Love Can Move Mountains*. The terrorist attacks of Sept. 11 really quieted me and I couldn't think what we could do but patriotic songs, then on Nov. 11 it dawned on me what remains is love."

"What truly amazes me is that these students with challenges can remember all these words. Sometimes I can't even do that."

Celebrate the Arts

What: VSA arts of Michigan's Southeast Region Committee, Farmington Musicals and the Livonia Mall join forces to present a festival of music, dance and the visual arts.

When: The festivities kick off with performances by VSA's children and adults with disabilities 10 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Friday, May 3 and noon to 3 p.m. Saturday, May 4

Where: Livonia Mall, Seven Mile and Middlebelt. For more information, call (248) 476-1160

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