# Little band of musical nuns take to the sea

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN RETIRW TRATZ

Dan Goggin hits the first note on the piano and four talented nuns and a Jewish actor take it away. The music and choreography are infectious. It's all Goggin and to tay seated through Anchors Away, the opening number of Meshuggah-Nunst—the latest installment in his Nunsense musical series about a little band of fun-loving sistery. It looks like Goggin has another rhit bound for Broadway. After 20 years of writing the nuns intunsual situations, Goggin communus distuitions, Goggin for strange plot. When all of the cast except for one fall ill on a cruise the nuns and remaining actor,

strange plot. When all of the cast except for one fall ill on a cruise, the nuns and remaining actor, Tevye from Fiddler on the Roof, are called upon to put on a show. The production opens with previews Wednesday, April 25, at Meadow Brook Theatre in Rochester Hills.

There's lots of singing and dancing, over 20 songs, lots of zany humor, said Goggin, whos in town directing the production. When it opens on Saturday, April 26, Goggin will head to LA to work with Darlene Love, Kay Ballard, Mimi Harris, Lee Merriweather, and Georgia Engel on an anniversary tour of Nunsense coming to the Fox Theatre in March.

"A musical director suggested the idea five years ago of putting, them on a cruise ship. Last year when we were in Florida doing Nunsense Amen, the all male version with Greg Luganis (Olympic diving champion) someone said you need to have a Jewish character, But you don't have to be Catholic, don't have to be Jewish to enjoy the musical. You just have to have a good time. You don't have to have seen Nunsense. I'm amazed at the number of new fans.'

time. You don't have to have seen Nunsense. I'm amazed at the number of new fans."
Goggin's attributes the longevity of the series to society's fascination with nuns - their tunics, veils and lifestyle. Even



Den Goggin leads Bambi Jones (left) and Kathy Robinson in a charus from the opening number of 'Meshuggah-Nuns!'

though it's been 20 years since though it's been 20 years since his first Nunsense musical opened at a New York City club, Gogglin's elementary years at St. Mary's in Alma continue to inspire his humor. All of the characters in the original Nunsense were based on the Dominican Sisters. Writing the music came just as easy, Gogglin's mother talked him lato taking plato lessons as a young boy so he could play organ

at Mass for \$1. Before long he

at Mass for \$1. Before long he was playing two Masses a day and earning \$12 a week. "It started as a joke," said Goggin. 'I was doing greeting cards when we decided to promote them in eard shops with an extress dressed as a nun. I started writing material for her and before I knew it we were doing a cabaret show at the Duplex in New York City. Four weekends turned into 38 weeks. After we

closed I went back to work on it to build characters. We opened Off Broadway in 1985. "I've written them to be time-less. They're played in real time, a little like reality TV." The spontaneity of the show is what keep Kathy Robinson coming back. In fact the actress keeps her nun's habit in the clos-ter pressed and ready to go just in case Goggin calls. The two origi-nally met in 1990 after Goggin ally met in 1990 after Goggin

case Goggin calls. The two originally met in 1990 after Goggin saw her in a Nunsense production in Boston. Robinson first played one of the sisters in 1987 and originated a role in Nunsense II for Goggin in 1992.

"It's a little different with each audience, said Robinson, a singer soon to release a CD of blues rock." It doesn't have the fourth wall so you never get tree of it. It's infectious. It's like that old hook they used in promotions - Nunsense is habit forming.

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"It's a great show for a character woman. Like me you can
start as a young nun and end up
Mother Superior. It's great for
someone like myself to play
Mother Superior because you
can be over 40 and overweight.
There's not many roles like that."

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#### MESRUGGAH-NUNS!

What: Dan Goggin's newest musical in the *Hunsense* comedy series Where Previews B p.m. Wednesday Friday, April 23-25. Opens B p m. Saturday April 26 continues 8 p.m. Wednesday-Saturday, 2 p m. and 6 p m. Saturday, 2 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. Sunday It vsM dough! Where: Meadow Brook Theatre in Wilson

Hall, Dakland University, Rochester Hills Tickets: \$24-\$38, previews \$19-\$26. Call (248) 377-3300

### **FILM FESTIVAL**

As skillfully filmed but humorous is God is Great, I'm Not, starring Audrey Tautou, lead in the popular art film Amelie. The actress plays a model whose need to channel her spiri into an identity leads her from Buddhism to Judaism.

#### TAKES IN CONTRAST

Of course every film doesn't feature a well-known actor or have "lots of razzle dazzle," said Magidson.
However, all speak to the film featival's mission of exploring different perspectives, from those that inspire contemplation to those to that simply entertain. Consider Stead in a Time for Terror, a documentary that examines life under the daily threat of terrorism, against "Schmelvis," in which three filmmakers and an Orthodox rabbi who impersonates Elvis set out to trace the King's Jewish roots.
Contrast The White Rose, an Academy Award-winning film about a secret society that protested the Nazi regime, against 'Skatting Through the Sand', a quest to make hockey legitimate in the desert landscape of Israel.

#### GROWTH & COMMUNITY

So far, the festival's programming formula has brought success and growth. The event is in its fifth year and con-sidered one of the largest Jewish film festivals in the coun-

try.

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Last year, 25 films were shown and 11,000 people attended.
This year, seven more films and an additional venue, The Palace Theater in Windsor, has been added. The number of screenings and festival days has been increased at existing venues. United Artists Theaters in Commerce Township, the Uptown Birmingham 8 and Michigan Theater in Ann Arbor.

Just last week, the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit awarded the festival with the Benard L. Maas Prize for Jewish Culture and Continuity, said Susan Marwil, festival co-chair and niece of Lenore Marwil. Also new is the Harold and Sarah Gottlieb Award, a \$7.500 prize for the best new Jewish film. This year's recipient, renowned documentary maker Frederick Wiseman, plans to attend both screenings of the first fiction film The Last Letter. A variety of other speakers and special guests are scheduled to attend screenings, lead discussions and take questions, as well.

well.

"We try to create a context for the films," Magidson said, "It's not an Encyclopedia Brittanica movie festival, but we think that if people can put their experience into a perspective, that is good and more enjoyable."

The format also works to unite the community, added Marwil. "It gives the people of Detroit the opportunity to come together. It also presents a venue that brings together the Jewish and non-Jewish community."

INTESTANAMENTO ERECT

## Flavio Varani set to perform

BY MICOLE STAFFORD STAFF WRITER

Brazilian-born planist Flavio

Brazilian-born planist Flavio Varani's attempts to sway his audience begin well before his fingers touch the keys. A recibal must not only stir an audience with performance, but also take them on an emotional journey through music, said Varani, longtime artist-in-resi-dence at Oakland University.

### **VARANI RECITAL**

What: Flavio Varani gives his annual recital. When: 8 p.m. Saturday, Anril 19.

Where: Varner Recital Hall on the campus of Oakland University in Rochester Hills. Tickets: General, \$10, VIP, \$50, and students, \$10, call (248) 370-3013 to make reservations.

leagues and had parallel lives," said Varani. Yet, the composers differed tremendously. "List was sort of the Eksis Presley of his time. Chopin was little more distant, but when he played people said he was the greatest." Although Varani is a teacher, he is first a performer, lecturing and discussion aren't on the program. "My intention is to be very dean, but without having to explain." ecomminet | (248) 901-2567 nstafford#oe.hor





