

Getting Around

By ETHEL SIMMONS



Launce takes over Somerset Theatre

WJR radio personality Jimmy Launce has some big ideas. Launce, who has been in partnership with Pierre Turgeon in Somerset Dinner Theatre, will become sole owner of the operation July 28.

Turgeon, Farmington Hills resident, is moving to California. Launce, who lives in West Bloomfield, plans to use Somerset Dinner Theatre in Troy as a springboard to other dinner theater activity.

"Within a year, I hope to build a suburban dinner theater, probably in the Birmingham-Bloomfield-Troy area," Launce said in a recent interview.

Somerset is the longest-running, continuous dinner theater in the Detroit area, Launce said. It has been operating successfully for 2½ years, offering many comedies. Local celebrities,

including Launce himself, have starred in the shows.

THE NEIL Simon comedy "The Sunshine Boys" runs through July 29. Then Jimmy Launce Production Inc. plans to bring in Simon's "Barefoot in the Park."

Forty-two performers tried out for the comedy's six major roles.

"Barefoot in the Park" has got more substance than many of the other Neil Simon comedies. It's in the same category as "Sunshine Boys," Launce said.

"There are a lot of good roles in the thing, oddly enough including The Telephone Man who has only a small part."

No big name star will be featured in "Barefoot in the Park," said Launce. Members of the cast are "all just good actors."

Launce said he thinks people tire of the big-name star constantly heading the cast.

"I don't want to put people of varying degrees of talent on stage."

AFTER "BAREFOOT" Launce will star in "Owl and the Pussycat" at Somerset Dinner Theatre, around November. Open auditions will be held for the co-starring role.

Launce has appeared on stage for 23 years as an actor. He and Pierre (Pete) Turgeon met when Launce starred in "Private Lives," which ran 20 weeks at Somerset.

Turgeon, who formerly had been in partnership with Ed Guest III, formed an association with Launce. For a time, Turgeon and Launce also presented shows at Crackers Dinner Theatre at the Squire's Table in Walled Lake.

"I plan to stay with the comedies or musicals," Launce said. "When the opportunity presents itself to offer a musical at Somerset, we will. But not a cut-down version."

"I personally abhor that. I think it's cheating the customers."

ANOTHER Neil Simon comedy, "The Odd Couple," in its 13th week for Dinner Playhouse at the Burn Street in Royal Oak, has been extended through July 9.

The Nancy Gurwin Production has two new co-stars, however, because Carl Williams and Kent Martin, who played Oscar Madison and Felix Unger, had previous commitments and could not continue past their 12-week contracts.

Guest of Birmingham is playing Oscar, the sloppy half of the odd couple, while Phil Milan of Westland, who played Vinnie in the show and understudied Felix, is now the fussy Felix.

Ed Guest, who is resident director for Dinner Playhouse, directed "The Odd Couple." He also will direct the musical "Once Upon a Mattress," which will star Nancy Gurwin, the producer.

Ms. Gurwin and Phil Marcus Esser

had a long run in her production of the musical "I Do! I Do!" at the Botsford Inn in Farmington Hills and Vittorio's in Livonia. She is a Southfield resident.

"Once Upon a Mattress" has a tentative opening date of July 14.

IN OTHER dinner theater news, yet another Neil Simon comedy "Plaza Suite," returns to the Sussex House in Southfield after a hiatus. Along with a prime rib dinner, the show runs July 7-Aug. 5. Joe Baunoch, Mary Geiger, Julie Klock and Bruce Campbell star in the Janus Productions play. Ms. Geiger, Dick Charlton and Fran Loud, who own the company, are all members of St. Dunstan's Guild and Birmingham Village Players.

THE ONLY dinner theater currently in town that does not serve up Neil Simon is the Theatre of the Arts production of a two-man revue, "The Machus Red Fox Revue" at the Machus Red Fox in Bloomfield Township.

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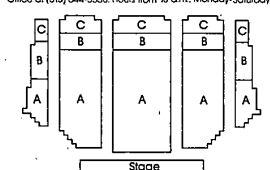
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