More to harmonicas than huff and puff...it's tough!

By MARK E. GALLO

Harmonica players are, by nature, a strong lot.

Traditionally a grossly underrated and underestimated instrument, the harmonica is too often shunted in the eyes of the public and music community.

If the Society for the Preservation and Advancement of the Harmonica (SPAH) has anything to say about this second-class citizenship, things will change for the better. The world will come to know the intricacy and beauty of the instrument. Harmonica enthusiasts will come to the Detroit area to celebrate the harmonica in just a few weeks.

On Thursday-Saturday, Sept. 6-8, in conjunction with the fifth annual Michigan Harmonica Week, the Michigan chapter of SPAH, known as the Harmonicas of Michigan, will play host to the 16th anniversary convention of SPAH at the Georgian Inn in Roseville.

Bi-monthly meetings of the Harmonicas of Michigan are held at the Elks Club of Clawson on Big Beaver Road in Troy.

This year's special guest artist at the convention will be none other than cheerfully flamboyant Principal Pops Conductor of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and Chief Arranger of the Boston Pops — our own Richard Hayman, a harmonica virtuoso of the highest degree.

APPEARING AS master of ceremonies for the event will be the lesser known but legendary Stagg McMann. This is no small-time gathering for a handful of harmonica enthusiasts, but a major convention that will draw musicians from as far away as Sweden and Japan and all of the U.S.

The convention is the culmination of months of hard work and brainstorming by Harmonicas of Michigan members Fred Merrill, Jerry Clark and Gordon Mitchell.

The convention planners seem to have all bases covered. They've reserved the entire second floor of the Georgian Inn and have access to additional space at the Red Roof Inn, across the street, to house the conventioneers.

They also have secured the use of a 200-seat ballroom at the Georgian Inn that will be utilized for workshops, seminars and just playing and socializing space, which is pretty much what will be happening Sept. 6-8.

The main event will be the Saturday night bash at Roma Hall of East Detroit. Open to the public, this 800-seat facility will provide an open bar, a sit-down dinner and dancing to a 15-piece band.

RICHARD HAYMAN will make his appearance with a harmonica floor show. Tickets are $25 in advance and $30 at the door.

Convention registration begins at 2 p.m. at the front desk of the Georgian Inn on Sept. 6. Saturday night's event runs 5:30 p.m.-1 a.m. Further information can be obtained from Convention Director Fred Merrill at 773-3594.

All harmonica enthusiasts and fans of plain old "good music" are being encouraged to attend the convention. This is a chance for harmonica players to hone their skills and for listeners to open their ears to the myriad of harmonica potentials.

The music will run a gamut of blues, country and great harmonica ensembles playing everything from classical to pop standards from the last 50 years.

Fred Merrill (center), convention director of the Society for the Preservation and Advancement of the Harmonica (SPAH); Gordon Mitchell (left), first vice president, SPAH, and Pat Van Rossen demonstrate harmonicas that are the world's largest and the smallest. All three players are members of Harmonicas of Michigan. (Staff photo by Dick Kelley)

Disco night helps MDA

The second annual "Disco for Dystrophy" returns to Roma's of Bloomfield, 7 p.m. to 1 a.m. Friday, Aug. 17, at 2101 S. Telegraph, Bloomfield Hills.

Disco contests, lessons and prizes will be provided by Marc Ankerman's "Best Disco in Town," and Arthur Murray Dance Studios.

All proceeds from the event, including a cash bar, will be donated to the Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) to be used for research and patient care.

Sponsored by Michigan 7-Eleven Food Stores, the disco is one of several activities organized by the convenience store to help raise $190,001 locally for the Jerry Lewis Labor Day Telethon.

Tickets, priced at $5, are available at the door or by calling 522-6430.

Last year's disco collected more than $3,000 for MDA and one held in July of this year, co-sponsored by 7-Eleven and WLBS, 102.7 FM, raised in excess of $4,500.

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