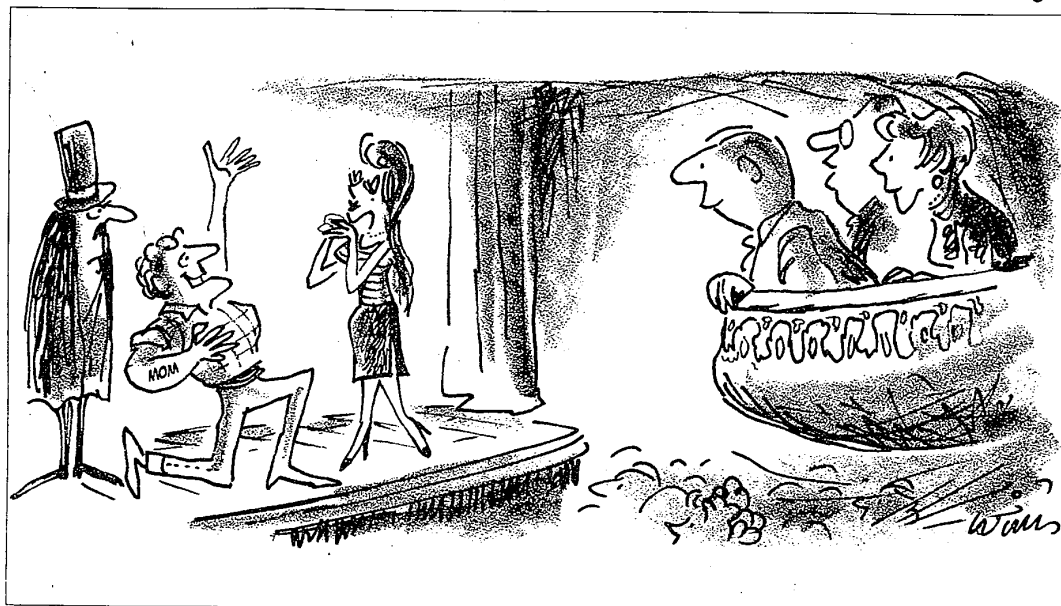


Ordinary people become special behind footlights



Amateur and professional performers alike get a chance to strut their stuff in civic and community theater productions.

Civic and community theaters are made up of ordinary people, the kinds of people who mow their lawns in the summer, who take their children ice skating in the winter and who work their jobs from nine-to-five every weekday.

That, though, is where the similarity to ordinary people ends.

Civic and community theater people have a driving need to be in the spotlight. They love the long, hard hours of work that are put into the production of every play. They thrive on the atmosphere which is present in these types of theaters. They also get a thrill out of making their audience happy.

In other words, these people are special people.

Some of these special people are housewives looking for ways to get out of the house. Others are frustrated professionals trying to find that one big chance that will launch them to stardom. A few are talented craftsmen who are teaching their skills to others. Many of them are involved just for the sake of being involved.

ABOVE ALL, these special people are dedicated to doing their best toward making their production the best it can be.

Beginning next Thursday, a series of articles by special writer Donald V. Calamia will appear in the entertainment pages of *The Observer & Eccentric*. "Curtain Calls" will discuss individual civic and community theaters in Birmingham-Bloomfield, West Bloomfield, Troy, Southfield, Farmington and Rochester.

Articles in the series will appear every few weeks and highlight the area's best-known theater groups. The Southfield Civic Theater is the subject for the Nov. 22 issue.

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Thursday, November 15, 1979

Disco lights keep on flashing but sound is strictly live jazz

By JIM WINDELL

The disco dance floor at Faces was crowded with people on a recent Thursday night. Surrounded by mirrors and chrome and rows of lights, the dance area spelled disco but the music shouted jazz.

There were no dancers on the disco dance floor because it was crowded with a big jazz band playing live music.

Faces, a three-year-old disco on Auburn Road in Avon Township, is presenting a radical departure from its usually successful Thursday night scene. Instead of recorded music, Thursday nights are now big band night and that band is the Afram Jazz Ensemble from Oakland University.

Not that Faces wasn't doing well with disco and recorded music. The three men who own Faces wanted something a little bit different. Partner Ted Andries believes that people want to do more than listen to recorded music and dance.

ANDRIES REMEMBERS the big band era and was especially fond of Stan Kenton's music. "Jazz is becoming very popular again," he commented before the opening night show recently.

Andries and his partners booked the Afram Jazz Ensemble without so much as hearing them. Consequently, Andries was apprehensive before the opening song at 9 p.m. Although the crowd was not large, it was an attentive one that appreciated the ensemble jazz.

An hour later, after an exciting version of Dizzy Gillespie's "Manteca," Andries was smiling and feeling more comfortable.

Afram had acquitted itself well. The students, under the direction of Oakland University Jazz Studies Program Instructor John Smith, played a wide variety of big band music and at times sounded like a professional band.

Smith didn't go easy on his students during their first professional gig. Tricky charts and complicated arrangements were included in both sets, as the music was taken from the books of the best big bands of the last several years. Count Basie, Thad Jones-Mel Lewis, Gillespie and Kenton.

Did the students falter in playing these charts? You bet.

They struggled with the beat on Thad Jones-Mel Lewis "Us" and the tricky

rhythms of the fiery Cuban song from the Gillespie band of the late '40s ("Manteca") weren't quite right — too slow. The bite and sharpness of last year's Afram Jazz Ensemble was missing.

BUT, ALSO MISSING were several of the excellent musicians who were in the program last year. Most of them have gone on to professional music jobs around the Detroit metro area.

For the most part, the students on the dance floor were freshmen who have played together for only six weeks. Some of those proved themselves to be outstanding jazz soloists already.

There is no doubt also about the capabilities of those who have been in the program before. Jennie Atkinson takes an occasional flute solo. Her pixie-ish slides on the Jones-Lewis "Little Pixie" were pleasant and tasty.

Percussionist and conga drummer Garnett Rodgers was featured in the powerhouse number "Manteca" which was a tighter effort by the ensemble.

Norm Zioltanowski on electric keyboard helped establish a funky sound

on Horace Silver's composition "Doodlin'."

Director John Smith mixed the numbers well in the initial performance. Afro-Cuban rhythms alternated with the slow beauty of "Winter Love" and a four trombone version of "I Can't Get Started With You" gave way to Frank Wess' "Shell Game" which featured a good trumpet solo by Kelvin Hunter.

AFTER THE FIRST performance, John Smith was excited. "This is a great opportunity for these kids," he said. "Very few club owners are into hardcore jazz. This is it."

Afram Jazz Ensemble is hardcore big band jazz. A bit raggedy at times and prone to clunkers. But, that's only because they haven't played together as much as they will have by the end of the year. Oakland University always produces excellent jazz musicians. Faces is brave enough to give them a chance to test out their ensemble and improvisational skills every Thursday night.

Nineteen students will benefit and Thursday nights at least at one disco, will be considerably enlivened.

'Mice and Men' won't raise pulse

By CHRISTINE BURKLI-BERY

The only word to describe Meadow Brook Theater's production of John Steinbeck's play, "Of Mice and Men," is adequate.

"Of Mice and Men" is playing through Dec. 2 at MBT on Oakland University's campus near Rochester. Curtain time is 8:30 p.m.

If you want to spend an adequately pleasant evening, go see it. There is nothing extraordinary or special about this production.

"Of Mice and Men" is about two migrant workers, George and Lennie. It was first staged in New York in 1937 and the novel was published in the same year.

The director of MBT's production is John Ulmer. His casting is one of the few aspects about the play that stands out. Every actor looks his or her part.

GEORGE AND Lennie are played by Michael Medeiros and David Graf. Medeiros is little but peaceful looking and Graf is big and dumb looking. Candy (Harry Ellerbe) is old and tired. Curley (Eric Uhler) is thin and mean, and Slim (David Jeffrey) is slim.

The only actor who transcends the commonplace is Medeiros, particularly in the first and last scenes. In the first scene, taking place on the Salinas River in California, Medeiros conveys well the relationship between George and Lennie. Lennie needs George to tell him what to do. George needs Lennie for companionship and to hold onto his dream of owning land.

When Medeiros recounts this dream at Lennie's request, he chants it like some religious ritual.

"We got a future," he says. "We got somebody to talk to that gives a damn about us Someday — we're gonna get the jack together and we're gonna have a little house

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and a couple of acres an' a cow and some pigs . . ." It is a dream that will never come true no matter how much they talk about it.

When George again chants the dream for Lennie, Medeiros brings forth the pathos of the final scene.

THE PLAY'S SETS, designed by Peter William Hicks, served their purpose. The first set, the river bank, is a mound of dirt, rocks and brush. The river is imaginary, which makes it rather difficult when Graf has to slurp up air instead of water. The background is merely a white curtain with blue light on it. It is a lot more barren than Steinbeck's description of it in his novel.

The bunkhouse and the barn are more realistic. The bunkhouse has the usual clattering of life sound. The barn has bales of hay, a loft, harnesses and lanterns.

The lighting is, again, adequate. Lighting designer Barry Griffith makes sure the lamps go on and off when someone pulls the cord and that day turns into night. The effect of the evening light shining through the barn adds to the strange happenings that occur there.

The way the actors enter and exit from the stage is particularly annoying. The audience can see them come on and go off between the set and the curtain. This distracts from the action going on in the play.

The fight in Act II — staged by Eric Uhler — is handled well. The action builds up to a climax, explodes and suddenly it is over. Just like in a real fight, the actors are surprised at how quick it happens but not that it did indeed happen.

Area actors in production

Several area residents are participating in the Theater Guild of Livonia-Redford production of the musical comedy "How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying."

Howard Egan of Farmington Hills appears as the big boss, J. B. Biggley. The supporting cast includes Patti Wright of Farmington Hills; Barbara Sullivan; Louise Martin and Patrick Kenney of Birmingham; and Tony Matar of Bloomfield Hills. Choreography is by Chris ZeVan of

Southfield. Ms. ZeVan has a wealth of choreographic experience and also sang and danced in the Broadway productions of "How to Succeed" and "Sweet Charity." She also has many film and on-camera commercial credits.

Performances will be given at 8 p.m. Nov. 23, 24, 30 and Dec. 1 at Stevenson High School Auditorium, 33500 Six Mile Road, Livonia. Seats may be reserved by calling 421-2500, ext. 221, or 464-0755.

Weekend

IN THE SUBURBS

- **Of Mice and Men** — powerful conflict by John Steinbeck continues 14th season for Meadow Brook Theater on Oakland University campus near Rochester. Production runs through Dec. 2. Ticket information at box office, 377-3300.
- **Hurley's** — Magic, five-piece combo appears through Dec. 1 in Northfield Hillon. Try. Show time 8:30 p.m. to 1:30 a.m. weekdays; 9 p.m. to 2 a.m. Fridays and Saturdays.
- **The Remarkable Mr. Penny** — comedy by Liam O'Brien presented by the First Theater Guild of Birmingham. Performances at 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, Nov. 16-17, in the Knox Auditorium of First Presbyterian Church, Birmingham. Senior citizens special matinee at 7 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 17. Tickets at the door.
- **Bloomfield Charley's** — presents pigskin party, with Monday night football getting underway about 9 p.m. in West Bloomfield. Seats available on a first-come, first-served basis.
- **Singer Ron Eliran** — accompanied by Johnny Trudell's Ensemble, plus Jewish humorist, Lou Mason, at 8 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 18, at Congregation Beth Achim in Southfield. Tickets by calling synagogue office at 352-8670.
- **Prisoner of Second Avenue** — Neil Simon comedy continues Thursday-Saturday, Nov. 15-17, presented by Farmington Players at barn theater in Farmington Hills. Ticket information at box office, 477-1066.

IN DETROIT

- **Ice Follies** — Shilstads and Johnson 44th edition with special guest star Peggy Fleming, through Sunday, Nov. 25, at Olympia Stadium. Tickets at Olympia Stadium Box Office Olympic Ticket Service in Birmingham and all J.L. Hudson's.
- **Lifeline** — five-piece, Top 40 and disco dance group plays through Dec. 1 at Celebration lounge in the Detroit Plaza Hotel, Renaissance Center. Lounge open 7:30 p.m. to 2 a.m., with performances beginning at 8:30 p.m. Monday-Saturday.
- **A Delicate Balance** — by Edward Albee, author of "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" at Detroit Repertory Theater. Performances at 8:30 p.m. every Thursday, Friday and Saturday; 7:30 p.m. Sunday, through Dec. 31. Ticket information at 868-1347.
- **Pearl Bailey** — appears through Sunday, Nov. 18, at the Music Hall Center in concert on Headliners series. Ticket information by calling 963-6943.
- **World Adventure Series** — presents Arthur Wilson with his travel film on "Maritime Canada" 2:30 p.m. Sunday at the Detroit Institute of Arts. Further information by calling 832-7676.
- **Fisher Theater** — "Oklahoma!" Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical in revival through Dec. 1. Laurence Guitard and Christine Andreas play young lovers in this all-new production. Box office, 872-1000.