

Pianist Terry Alan looks to the past



Terry Alan plays piano Tuesdays-Saturdays from 6-11 p.m. and Sundays for brunch 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Restaurant L'Auberge. (Photo by Jim Windell)

By JIM WINDELL

Terry Alan is an old-fashioned man. A casual conversation shows his taste and his values to be a throwback to an earlier time.

When he plays the piano, his values are evident also. George Gershwin, Cole Porter and Irving Berlin are likely to roll off his talented and musical fingers.

During a recent Sunday morning brunch in the dark-paneled and conservatively regal Restaurant L'Auberge, in Troy's Somerset Inn, the tunes played are old-fashioned. "Once in a While," "Someone to Watch Over Me," "Stay as Sweet as You Are," "Misty," "Body and Soul" and "Sunrise Serenade."

That last song is significant for this jazz and cocktail pianist. "Sunrise Serenade" was the theme song of Terry Alan's boyhood piano idol, Frankie Carle.

HOW MANY PIANISTS do you run into these days who list Frankie Carle as their favorite piano player?

"My influences on the piano include Carmen Cavallaro and the music of Hugo Montenegro is a particular favorite of mine," Alan said, as he sank into a comfortable, soft chair during a break between brunch sets. "And I can only listen to some rock tunes if they're interpreted by Percy Faith."

With his warm brown eyes twinkling, the handsome, 41-year-old pianist asked, "What's wrong with having a drink and talking over Gershwin?" He answers the question mostly through his music, which people have been enjoying during their meals for the last 30 years.

At L'Auberge, whether it is 11 o'clock on Sunday morning or 11 o'clock on a week night, Alan's repertoire is a blend of familiar jazz and pop

tunes. Keys are changed, and the songs modulate easily into one another in a long and interesting sequence of old favorites.

Not only is Terry Alan's music comfortably old-fashioned, so are his ethics and values.

"A FEW YEARS AGO, I dropped out of the music business for about three years to go into sales. I was successful at it, but I couldn't stand the games that were played," he said.

He told about a major sales company that wasn't always on the up and up. That bothered him and he left for a smaller company. When he ran into the same sort of shady dealings with customers, he made a decision. "I said to myself that I can't play these games anymore. So I went back to music. Music is the most honest thing there is."

Not surprisingly, Alan couldn't stay away from music for more than a brief period of time. "My whole life has been music," he confided.

Frankie Carle was his first remembered musical love as a boy, but Alan's family always had Benny Goodman records and those of other big bands of the '40s on the phonograph in their Wyandotte home. And when he asked his mother for a piano, he quickly got one.

"But, like most kids, I didn't want to practice. At our house, there were rules and regulations," he remembers. "You had to practice before baseball. That was a must."

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Later, there were several years of study at the Wyandotte Conservatory of Music. That study lasted throughout high school and during his two years at Henry Ford Community College.

AFTER COLLEGE, he attended Receiving Hospital to learn to be an X-ray technician. His degree completed, he ventured out to leave music behind and become an X-ray technician. The first of several unusual and unethical experiences chased him right back into music.

He told the story like this: "I went to work in Detroit for a doctor who owned his own medical clinic. But, before I was there a month, he got arrested for performing abortions. This was well before abortions were legal. So I was quickly back in the music business."

Alan's first professional piano experience came at age 16, when his father had to sign contracts for him. There was a place called the Colonial House on Telegraph at Goddard Road. I played there for tips one summer while

I was going to summer school. I guess that started me on a professional career."

For 20 years after that, there were numerous restaurants, supper clubs, lounges and bands. "I had my own trio around this area for many years," Alan said. "For a long time I had Eddie Krupa from the old WJR Orchestra on guitar and Eddie Wren on drums. We also had a girl by the name of Charlotte Dunn doing vocals."

Among the spate of clubs and restaurants were the Hilton at Metro Airport, The Apartment, Taylor's Townhouse, The Red Cedars and "almost everything along Telegraph." He also had a chance to play in a big band.

"I TURNED IT DOWN," Alan says, "and it was a good band. It meant an awful lot of traveling and I was tired of being on the road." He had his share of traveling with his music and living out of a suitcase between the ages of 25 and 30. "There was nothing permanent about it and after a while one hotel looks like another."

Setting down in Detroit also meant getting married. But his life as a pianist didn't lend itself to marriage. "She was a schoolteacher and I was a piano player. She was gone in the days and I was gone at night. We finally split up with no animosity. It takes a real unique individual to be married to a musician."

Civic Theatre

'Our Town' plays at pleasant pace

By DONALD V. CALAMIA

The Southfield Civic Theatre opened its doors for the first time this season with a well-paced, though occasionally subdued, production of Thornton Wilder's "Our Town."

Presented last weekend in the Southfield Parks and Recreation Building, "Our Town" chronicles the lives of two New England families, as told by an omniscient narrator. The play was performed on a bare stage utilizing only ordinary chairs and ladders to suggest scenery. "Our Town" requires strong acting and tight directing to convey Wilder's message to the audience.

Much to the credit of director/set designer Don Johannes, cast members portraying all 24 residents of Grover's Corners, N.H., were well-suited for their roles.

The cross-section of talent used by Johannes easily represented the kinds of people who really inhabited the small towns throughout America during the turn of the century.

LEADING THE CAST as the stage manager was Bill Lucas, whose unique rapport with the audience made it appear as if he were in your own home telling a story instead of in front of an audience. Though a few of his lines were lost behind the first few rows, his warm and comfortable nature, along with his expressive face, easily conveyed the meanings of his monologues.

Lucas also had the chance to show his versatility by portraying the kindly and understanding soda fountain clerk in the play's second act. This role is much different than that of the stage manager.

Lucas succeeded in developing the soda fountain clerk's character in just a few short minutes, by simply changing his walk and his speech pattern, so that many people in the audience thought a yet-unseen and effervescent actor had taken the role.

Heddi Rose as Emily Webb portrayed a strong character through the excellent use of her voice. Ms. Rose's lack of facial and body gestures, though, made her appear cold and aloof.

Her closing scene in the cemetery in which Emily learns she can not live her life again, is one of the most touching scenes in the play. With more training

and experience, Ms. Rose could become one of this area's leading dramatic actresses.

By contrast, Emily's boyfriend-turned-husband, George Gibbs, played by Kevin Taylor, was a bundle of nervous energy from start to finish. His lines were generally delivered in a quick manner, while his arms and head were bobbing about.

Taylor's scenes with Ms. Rose were low-keyed for what you'd expect from young lovers, but Taylor's interpretation of George was more than effective.

DAVID FOX as Dr. Gibbs and Robert McCoy as newspaper editor Mr. Webb were both well-chosen for their roles, as each looked as if he belonged in his character's profession in real life. Each was believable; in his role as a father, McCoy had the tendency to look thoughtfully at the stage floor while delivering his lines.

As the mothers, Jeanne Johannes as Mrs. Gibbs and Sha McGill as Mrs. Webb worked well with the rest of the cast in showing the love, concern and care they had for their families.

Liveliest member of the cast was attorney Dean Shanahan, who put his courtroom experiences to practice in his role of the Professor.

His few minutes on stage at the show's opening were among the comic highlights of the evening.

The rest of the cast gave good performances throughout the show and were instrumental in giving the show the ensemble effect which kept it running smoothly at all times.

Direction by Johannes was imaginative and well planned. However, a few actors occasionally found themselves accidentally stuck behind another actor while delivering their lines.

Costume designer Camille Vetrina's excellent costumes were accurate and fashionable for the period. Lighting design by Tony Vaillancourt was ample and moody.

Roscoe Mitchell stars at Cornucopia concert

Roscoe Mitchell, internationally acclaimed composer and instrumentalist, will be guest artist for the Dec. 6 concert by the Creative Arts Collective.

Second in a series of four performances titled "Creative Music Cornucopia Part I," the concert will be given at 8 p.m. in the Detroit Institute of Arts Recital Hall.

Tickets are available at the Art Institute ticket office in advance (832-2730) and on an availability basis at the door. Also performing will be A. Spencer Barefield (guitars, piano), Anthony Hol-

land (reeds) and Tani Tabbal (percussion).

FOUNDER OF the Creative Arts Collective, Mitchell is also a founding member of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) and the Art Ensemble of Chicago. He has performed extensively with such musicians as Anthony Braxton, Muih Richard Abrams, George Lewis, Leo Smith and Spencer Barefield.

IN THE SUBURBS

• **The Gin Game** — bittersweet comedy starring Phyllis Thaxter and Larry Gates through Dec. 16 at the Birmingham Theatre. Performances at 8 p.m. Tuesday-Sunday, matinees at 1 p.m. Wednesday and 2 p.m. Sunday. Ticket information at box office, 644-3533.

• **Comedy Castle** — improvisational theater every Monday and Tuesday; comedians Wednesday-Saturday at Friday's in Pine Lake Mall, West Bloomfield. Show times at 9 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday, 8:30 and 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Reservations by calling 651-3552.

• **Same Time Next Year** — romantic comedy presented by Jimmy Launce Productions, Friday and Saturday evenings through December at Somerset Dinner Theatre, Somerset Mall, Troy. Buffet dinner prepared and served by Alfred's Restaurant at 7:30 p.m.; show at 8:45 p.m. Reservations at 643-8865.

• **Angle's** — big band sound of the Dick Murphy Big Band, 9 p.m. to midnight Sundays in Farmington Hills. Cover charge.

• **Charley's Aunt** — farce by Brandon Thomas presented by Meadow Brook Theatre on Oakland University campus near Rochester. Performances through Dec. 30. Ticket information at 377-3300.

• **The Raven Gallery** — presents Mike and Barbara Smith, with songs, stories and comedy. Mike Cross, singer/musician/poet/jester, through Sunday, Dec. 9, in Southfield. Reservations at 557-3552.

IN DETROIT

• **Music Hall Center** presents Ben Vereen, star of "Pippin" and "Roots," on Headliners series through Sunday, Dec. 9. Performances 8:30 p.m. Thursday-Friday, 7 and 10 p.m. Saturday; 4 and 8 p.m. Sunday. Ticket information at box office, 563-7650.

• **Detroit Film Theatre** presents "A Woman's Decision" (Poland 1977, Krzysztof Zanussi, director) at 7 and 9:30 p.m. Friday, Dec. 7, "The Wizard of Oz" (U.S. 1939, Victor Fleming, director) starring Judy Garland, Ray Bolger, Bert Lahr, Jack Haley and Margaret Hamilton, Technicolor classic at 7 and 9:30 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 8, in Detroit Institute of Arts auditorium. Ticket information at box office, 832-2730.

• **Celebration lounge** in Detroit Plaza Hotel presents Flying Easy, six-piece group led by Bill Platt, who plays multi-keyboards, through Saturday, Dec. 15. Located on Promenade Level of hotelin Renaissance Center. Hours 7:30 p.m. to 2 a.m., with performances beginning at 8:30 p.m. Monday-Saturday.

• **Fisher Theatre** presents Neil Simon's "Chapter Two," comedy starring David Heidsenck, Barbara Anderson, Jane A. Johnston and Vincent Baggett, through Sunday, Jan. 6. Ticket information at box office, 872-1000.

• **Paradiso Dinner Theatre** presents Nancy Gurnin Production of "Funny Girl" starring Nancy Gurnin of Southfield. Performances of musical continue Fridays and Saturdays through December. Dinner at 7 p.m., show at 8:30 p.m. at Paradiso, 17630 Woodward. Reservations at 869-3988.

Estate revs up for Christmas show

By MARK CLAUSEN

While many Oakland University students watched the "Sound of Music" on television Sunday night, 15 were making their own musical sounds.

But it wasn't just right, so Sally Albrecht, musical director of the Meadow Brook Estate, stopped them in the middle of one of their new numbers.

"You didn't take a breath there. Do it again," Ms. Albrecht said. "I know. I'm as tired as you are," she replied.

But when the piano played the lead-in, faces brightened. Dazzling, exaggerated smiles and wide-open eyes seemed to convey energy to the audience reappeared.

IT IS ALL part of being in the Estate, a group of 20 music and theater majors who dance and sing jazz and pop songs for intimate dinner parties and banquet hall concerts. They've traveled around the state and to New York City and Chicago since their formation 2½ years ago.

Dec. 7-9, the group will perform its Christmas show in Varner Recital Hall on the OU campus. Directing it will be actor, director, composer and arranger Jester Hairston.

The day after their last show, they will leave with Hairston on a tour of Mexico. They will sing for Posada, the

big fiesta in Mexico City.

Sunday's rehearsal was particularly important because the choreographer, Stevie Rivers, flew in from Cincinnati to work with the group for the day. Ms. Albrecht estimated the group would practice more than five hours.

"That's a messy little transition there," she said to Ms. Rivers. "They don't know how to march. We added that march at the end."

"I'll fix it," Ms. Rivers said. The group watched patiently as Ms. Rivers showed them a new step. Some

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sat down from the fatigue of singing and dancing all day and performing Friday and Saturday nights.

One Estate member estimated that in the hectic two weeks before leaving for Mexico the group will spend more than 65 hours together, rehearsing and performing.

Because they will leave for Mexico during final exam week, all course work — including final tests, research papers and recitals — must be finished this week. This only compounds the existing pressure.

Heavy time demands wear down group members, making sickness a problem, Ms. Albrecht said. But mem-

bers generally don't miss many performances.

"WHEN IT GETS time to perform, you're into it," she said. "You have to perform no matter how you feel."

Despite long hours of rehearsal, the students' good mood, play practical jokes and laugh at their mistakes. "This group plays together," said Ms. Albrecht. "We've worked all afternoon. Things are not always this loose."

"Julie don't cheat. Not so much profile," said Ms. Rivers. "Look at John and Lonnie. I love it."

"One of the number one problems is how do you start a group without a conductor," she added. "So much of it is just feeling each other."

The job of getting the group to start together without her falls to Ms. Albrecht, who came to OU after working for three years with show choirs at the University of Miami in Florida.

She feels the Estate has a "lot more movement and a better pop sound" than the group she worked with. "I worked with classical singers doing pop. These people are in commercial music."

"There are a lot of show choirs around, but I don't think they have anywhere near the caliber of performers we have right now."

She feels the group has matured considerably over its years together. One reason, she said, is the establishment of a degree in commercial music offered through OU's music department.

"The whole thing we try to teach them is how to be on stage and sell themselves on stage," she said. "We give them as much performance experience as possible."

The commercial music degree has sparked so much interest in show choirs that the university started a second group called Starshine. The 19-member group will perform with Estate at the Christmas show.

"You're on stage now and the curtain is opening," said Ms. Albrecht, during the introduction to a Christmas collage, a medley of holiday songs.

"Get your knees going. Three and a double."

As things break down, one of the members said "We didn't move, quite enough, did we?"

"No," said Ms. Albrecht. "And John, you have to look for Santa Claus, not just hold your mike."

"Let's do it again. We're not there yet."

"I'm dreaming of a White Christmas..." and off they went for more rehearsal.