

'Rumpelstiltskin' producer lets down his hair

By JULIE BROWN

A shopping mall may seem like an unlikely place for live theater, but Troy's Oakland Mall will be just the place for it this week.

"As I began to look at shopping centers, they were becoming more than just a place to shop," said Henry K. Martin, director and producer of the Actor's Trunk Co. The company has staged children's theater at the mall since 1974, and will present "Rumpelstiltskin" on Friday, Saturday, and Sun-

day June 22-24 at 1 and 3 p.m. daily.

"We did the first program based on a Middle Ages concept," Martin said. "People came to the marketplace to see secular performances. I came to the promotion director and said I'd like an opportunity to do theater in the mall."

The theater company staged its first production, "Jack and the Beanstalk," at the mall in 1974. Since then, "Beauty and the Beast," "The Emperor's New Clothes," and "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" have been produced.

"I WANT TO bring theater to as many children as possible," Martin said. "Our success is keyed on one premise — our audience is children, and we do it the way they want to see it, not the way adults think they want to see it."

"You can tell, if children start looking at the ceiling and moving around, you know you're losing them."

Martin is the artistic director of Henry K. Martin Productions, Lathrup Village, and has produced industrial films and directed business theatrical productions. His wife, Dr. Sue Martin, is associate producer of the production company and a dramatics professor at the University of Windsor. The Martins live in Birmingham.

"Children are a product of TV," Martin said. "In our theater, I wanted to make it participatory. Children do not watch theater as adults do. Children know the story, but they want to see it happen and participate."

Martin added that five of the dwarfs in the mall production of "Snow White"

were played by children from the audience.

THE THEATER company has traveled to cities in the United States and Canada, including Phoenix, Houston, Dallas, Fort Worth, Kansas City, and Toronto. Martin said the troupe is in the process of developing a bilingual program to travel to French speaking Quebec.

"We also have a Shakespeare for children program in Canada," Martin said. "Shakespeare is in it himself, and he greets them and takes them through the play. We're gearing it for their age category."

Martin said that he is pleased with the success of the Shakespeare program, and is especially flattered when

school groups from Stratford, Ont., come to the performance.

The actors who appear in the Actor's Trunk productions are professionals. "I met them at auditions and such," Martin said. He added that Linda Hart, a local actress who appeared in "Ladyhouse Blues" at the Birmingham Theater, will perform in "Rumpelstiltskin."

"The main thing about the program here is the aura created by children laughing in a mall," Martin said. "We're demonstrating to them what an actor does. An actor assumes the characteristics of a totally different character."

MARTIN ESTIMATED that more

than 100 people will see each performance at the mall.

"A lot of customers who shop at the mall are motivated to come specifically to participate in the program," Martin said. "I think it bears out that today there is so little for kids, that people who normally would take their business to another mall bring their business and kids here."

Martin advised parents to bring their families to the show. "Bring your children," he said, "but don't come to see the play, come to see your children."

"I sometimes feel we're trying to make our children become young adults too soon," he said. "Let them be kids. Fantasy is a great place for them."



Henry K. Martin talks about his Actor's Trunk Company. (Staff photo)

'The main thing about the program here is the aura created by children laughing in a mall.'

— Director/producer
Henry K. Martin

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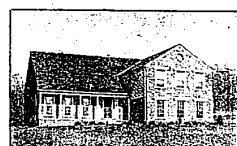
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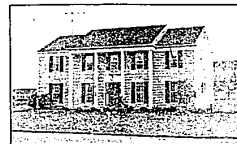
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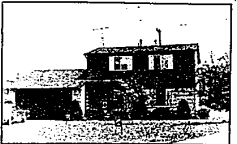
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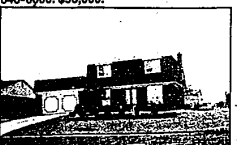
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