

Manhattan Transfer jazzes up its lounge act

It used to be that the Manhattan Transfer was a chic nightclub and hotel lounge act that dealt in nostalgia and effortless quartet vocals. Not anymore. You could see before the show began Saturday night at Meadow Brook Music Festival that this was no ordinary lounge act. The thick sheath of cables that snaked down the center aisle and was hooked to two banks of 12 speakers and the imported light show announced that this was going to be a show to remember.



on music
James Windell

And so it was. Not only is a present-day Manhattan Transfer show a visual and aural extravaganza, it is also sold

out. That tells you the popularity of their type of vocal jazz. Like Linda Ronstadt bringing nostal-

gia back into its own, the two guys and two girls of Manhattan Transfer have spearheaded the vocal jazz renaissance, coming more successful than any other group that's ever put words to jazz solos.

So, thanks to "Birdland" and other Manhattan Transfer hits, the type of singing that Lambert, Hendricks & Ross pioneered in the late 1950s has found popular acceptance. Which does not mean that MT is a slouch quartet looking for the easiest way to make a

back. The group's been paying its dues through 12 albums dating back to the early 1970s.

WEARING FLASHY clothes and with a traditional acoustic quintet backing them, Tim Hauser, Janis Siegel, Alan Paul and Cheryl Benlyne began with "Rambo." Not a nod to Sly Stallone, but a tune written by jazz trombonist J.J. Johnson and featured on their soon-to-be released album, "Vocalese."

"Vocalese," as the quartet explained, is writing and singing lyrics to recorded jazz solos. Just as Lambert, Hendricks & Ross before them, MT sang, often in dizzying and dazzling fashion, new lyrics to old or recognizable solos.

Horace Silver's "Doodlin'" and a Thad Jones tune got the MT treatment, which means harmonies sung in an exquisite and almost-always faultless style.

It is to be noted that when the group takes chances, as with the late Clifford Brown's chord progressions of "Joy Spring," there are missed cues. But the exuberance and the stylings are still impressive.

Because of the number of tunes done by MT which are to be heard on their new album, Jon Hendricks, the writer

of vocalese lyrics, came in for considerable praise. Several outstanding sets of lyrics in the show came from Hendricks' splendid and inventive pen, including those for "Killer Joe."

EVIDENCE that MT has moved from the small concert hall to the big-time concert is the pacing of their performance. When they returned for the second set, there was a new staging and the backup band switched to electronic instruments and keyboards. With this change, the tempo of the performance picked up, too.

The foursome's stage presence and ability to spark the interests of a diverse audience was noted as they did a section of 1950s-style rock-and-roll tunes that had the audience clapping and rocking. Their four-part harmony wasn't sacrificed when they did jazz and more rock-oriented tunes. But just to remind the crowd of what MT was all about, they did Camille Adderley's "Janine" before bringing the show to a peak with their hit "Birdland."

And then, as if to say that they can even get better, they did an all-out version of "Boy From New York City" that drove the audience to their feet, insisting on a second encore.

more upcoming things to do

Continued from Preceding Page

PIAF

"Piaf" opens at the Attie Theatre on Friday and continues through Aug. 18. Performance times 8 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays, 5:30 and 9 p.m. Saturdays and 6:30 p.m. Sundays. The play is a series of vignettes in the life of Edith Piaf, the French singer. Sheri Nichols stars in the play written by Pam Gens.

MORE AT ATTIE

"The Ease of Always," winning entry in the Attie Theatre's second annual Young Authors Contest, will be presented at 7 p.m. Monday at the Attie, Third Avenue at West Grand Boulevard. Admission is \$3. The play, about two teen-agers taking their first steps into adulthood, is by Amalia Gladhart, an East Lansing high school senior.

IRISH MUSIC

The Blarney Brothers play traditional Irish music at Savina's Other Place, 28641 Lawrence, Center Line, at 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For more information, call 758-7130.

THE RAVEN

Bob Gibson and special guest Mike Smith will be presented in two shows, at 7:30 p.m. (doors open at 6 p.m.) and 10 p.m. (doors open at 9:15 p.m.) Friday at the Raven at the Northville Community Center. Tickets at \$8 for each performance may be reserved at least one week ahead by calling 349-9420.

CHAPLIN FILM

"The Circus" will be the culmination of "Chaplin Lost and Found," a two-week retrospective of films by the silent era's Charlie Chaplin, at 8 p.m. Saturday at the Michigan Theatre in Ann Arbor. The film showings are part of the Ann Arbor Summer Festival. Before "The Circus" starts, a vaudeville prologue will feature on-stage circus acts. Musical accompaniment for the prologue and film will be provided by the Ann Arbor Chamber Orchestra and theater organist Dennis James. For more information, call 688-8397.

WSU THEATER

Fourteen plays in three theaters, by playwrights from Shakespeare and

Moliere to George S. Kaufman and Tennessee Williams, are scheduled for the Hilberry, Bonstelle and Studio theater seasons in 1985-86 at Wayne State University in Detroit. The Hilberry productions, performed in rotating repertory, are "The Taming of the Shrew," "Step, Look and Listen," "The Royal Family," "Equus," "A Midsummer Night's Dream," "The Misanthrope" and "All Over Town." The Bonstelle plays are "Cat Among the Pigeons," "Peter Pan," "Return from Harlem," "Much Ado About Nothing" and "Period of Adjustment." The Studio productions are "To My Father's House" and "P.S. — Porter to Springsteen." For more information, call the box office at 577-2072.

27TH SEASON

The University Players has announced its 27th season, for 1985-86, offering five main stage productions at the University of Windsor in Canada. Included are "Come Back to the 5 & Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean" by Ed Graczyk, "The Wayside Motor Inn" by A.R. Gurney Jr., the musical "Once Upon a Mattress," "Picnic" by William Inge and Shakespeare's "A

Midsummer Night's Dream." For more information, call the box office at 510-253-4565.

RONNIE GILBERT

A benefit concert featuring Ronnie Gilbert will be held at 8 p.m. today at the Michigan Theatre in Ann Arbor. Gilbert was a founding member of the American folk ensemble the Weavers. Joining Gilbert will be Si Kahn, who composes and sings in a folk tradition. The concert is part of a convention of the New Jewish Agenda. Tickets at \$10 are available at all Ticket World outlets including Hudson's.

Information for the Upcoming calendar may be submitted to Ethel Simmons, Entertainment Editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. Mailing address is: P.O. Box 503, Birmingham 48012, or 38251 Schoolcraft Road, Livonia 48150. Entertainment events should be open to the public. Preference is given to information about residents of, or events within, the circulation area of the 12 Observer & Eccentric newspapers.

Comedy about Chekhov opens

Third and final production of the Professional Summer Theatre Series will be the comedy "Chekhov in Yalta," by John Driver and Jeffrey Hadow, opening tonight at the University of

Windsor in Ontario.

Performances continue at 8 p.m. Thursdays-Sundays through July 28. For ticket information, call the box office at 253-4565.



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