

# Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



(Wb-4C, T-Ro-7D, F-7C) (SC)

Thursday, March 20, 1986 O&amp;E

## Scaring listeners

### Detroit-area writers, actors work on radio mystery

By Sharon Dargay  
staff writer

**W**ILLIE JAMES JONES wants to frighten you to death.

Or at the very least, make life a little unsettling twice weekly.

"I started five years ago with an idea after listening to WJR's mystery theater. I was fascinated by it. I got the idea to do a radio show," said the producer of "Proceed with Caution Radio Theatre."

The half-hour series, leaning more toward melodrama than the macabre, airs at 10:30 a.m. Mondays on WPON-AM and at 8 p.m. Thursdays on WDTR-FM.

Jones, a Hamtramck High School English teacher, wrote the first 13 episodes originally broadcast on WCHB-AM and bankrolled production costs without sponsorship funding. Since "Proceed with Caution" debuted a year ago, Detroit Arts Council grants and an eager — and volunteer — team of would-be actors, semiprofessional performers and writers have eased the program's shoestring budget.

The cast, which changes with each new episode, rehearses in Jones' Detroit home several times before taping in the cramped recording booth at WPON studios in Bloomfield Township.

**BUT STOP-AND-GO** recording sessions, informal rehearsals and cramped quarters don't bother some actors, like Bloomfield Hills mother-of-two Nancy Matejak.

"That's show biz. I'm an aspiring actress. You try to do anything you can," she said.

Matejak views the radio experience as another star on her broadcast acting resume. The former commercial artist has performed on stage and taught theater workshops but is aiming for commercial film and television work.

"My goal is to make this lucrative within another year or my husband is going to make me work," she said with a laugh. "I've been doing this (acting) for four years."

For Birmingham playwright Therese McGee — one of several amateur and semiprofessional writers who contribute scripts to the program — "Proceed with Caution" provides an audience for stories that might otherwise gather dust at home.

"It's a fun thing to do. It's nice to get it produced," said McGee, who's working on a dramatic play and several comedies in her spare time. "I'm past 60. They're (actors) all quite young. I'm very much their senior. But I'm hoping I can do more with them."

**JONES SPENDS** two to four hours taping the actors' parts at WPON before mixing in sound effects and editing — another six to eight hours in post production — on portable equipment at home.

"We don't know much about him," Matejak noted. "As an actor you just go into things not knowing what you're reading for. He had a major audition for a TV pilot of the same series. It's possible it really could succeed. I think there's a real method to his madness."

With limited broadcast experience and an untested dramatic market in Detroit radio, Jones systematically researched his idea before recording the first two pilots.

Jones, who holds a bachelor of fine arts degree in theater from the University of Detroit and a master's degree in education from Wayne State University, is an experienced actor and director. While in college, he also wrote several scripts, one which won a writer's festival in 1976 and was staged at the Music Hall in 1977.

He convinced a college business class to conduct market surveys in Detroit and wrote the first 13 episodes in his spare time after work.

"I did one thing toward it every day," he said.

"It would have been two years sooner but I got sidetracked. I got involved in a soap opera produced by Channel 62. I started working on it, but it didn't go anywhere."

**THE EXPERIENCE** set his own project back but didn't dampen his enthusiasm for broadcast drama. Instead, it brought him together with local actors, broadcasters and other professionals who have an interest in drama.



GARY GABRIEL/staff photographer

Willie James Jones, producer of "Proceed with Caution Radio Theatre," gets ready for a taping session at radio station WPON in Bloomfield Township.

Meanwhile, Jones continued writing and in late 1984 taped pilots for the program and began shopping for a sponsor. When sponsorship didn't pan out ("they want to invest in someone with a reputation"), he paid for air time and production costs out of his own pocket.

Jones handled sound effects the same way, using a combination of pre-recorded sounds and handmade effects.

With New Detroit and Arts Council grants, Jones bought time on WPON,

an ethnic-talk programmed station, and convinced WDTR, the Detroit Public Schools radio station, to air the program.

"WDTR was almost unexpected. They really like it. I've heard good comments about it," Jones noted.

Since then, he was approached by a production company to try a television pilot. Jones and crew will videotape one of the radio dramas this month.

"I'd like to do both. I have confidence in it. When you have a dream, you think about it every single day."



Actors record the weekly broadcast. (Above) Margaret Laflin and Richard Blumenfeld go over a script. (Below) Michael J. Pieper (left) and Carlos Saxon discuss one of the scenes.



## upcoming things to do

### ● POLICE DRAMA

John Amos, who starred as Sam in the Birmingham Theatre production of Aifon Fugard's "Master Harold ... and the Boys," returns to star in the police drama "Split Second" by Detroit Dennis McIntyre. The play will open a four-week engagement Friday, April 4, at the Birmingham Theatre. For ticket information, call the box office at 644-3553.

### ● MUSICAL OASIS

"The Sunday Afternoon Thing" featuring the music of Joel Mabius, will be presented from 5-7 p.m. Sunday, April 6, at the Birmingham Unitarian Church in Bloomfield Hills. The concert series offered by the Musical Oasis of Birmingham will present the music of Jim Perkins, from 5-7 p.m. Sunday, April 13, at the church. Tickets for each concert are \$4. For more information, call the Musical Oasis at 540-4466.

### ● "GOOD DOCTOR"

Neil Simon's "The Good Doctor" opens a four-week run at Meadow Brook Theatre at 8 p.m. Thursday, March 27, on the Oakland University campus in Rochester Hills. The cast includes Detroit actors Juliet Randall and Meadow Brook favorites Dona Werner, Donald Ewer and Joey Golden.

For ticket information, call the box office at 377-3300.

### ● JAZZ SOUNDS

The Jazz Guitar Ensemble at Oakland University will present its second concert of the season at 8 p.m. Tuesday, April 1, in Varner Recital Hall on campus. The free program will have arrangements of music by jazz greats and also originals by Steven Carrier, the ensemble director. Among mem-

bers of the jazz ensemble is Rick Matlo of West Bloomfield.

### ● JOINT CONCERT

Two show ensembles in the Oakland University commercial music program

will appear in a joint concert at 8 p.m. Thursday, April 13, at Varner Recital Hall. University Drive and Starshine perform Broadway, pop, jazz, rock and

Continued on Next Page

Available Thurs. - Sun., March 27, 28, 29 &amp; 30

## Easter Weekend for the whole family!

Kids of all ages will love Easter weekend with us! Find an Easter Basket filled with goodies in your room and see the magnificent Easter display in the lobby with live bunnies and spectacular sculptures showing the talents of our culinary staff. On Sunday, the Easter Bunny will hand out jelly beans and other treats, plus there's an amazing Easter Buffet available (reservations essential).

**Sheraton University Inn**  
3200 Woodward Ave. Detroit, MI 48202  
313-996-0600

RESERVATIONS  
(313) 996-0600



Subject to availability and change without notice.

## Topinka's PRESENTS Starline

ALL STAR REVUE

Neil Diamond  
Tina Turner  
Barry Manilow  
Wayne Newton  
Diana Ross  
Boy George  
Stevie Wonder  
Bobby Darin  
Roy Orbison

\*\*\*\*\*  
A Spectacular Vegas Style Stage Production,  
Come see the famous look alike star impersonators  
performing LIVE! See your favorite Star!  
Music By: The Starline Orchestra  
Also Featuring: Beautiful Dancing Show Girls  
Showtimes: Tues. thru Saturday  
7:30 P.M. and 10:30 P.M.  
\*\*\*\*\*

Phone  
531-9000

Cover Charge



## This Easter 'everybunny' is dining at our buffet.

Make this Easter a wonderful family dining experience. Spend a part of your Easter at our incredible Easter buffet.

No matter what time you arrive you'll find a sumptuous assortment of tender juicy carved meats and other entrees, crisp fresh salads, tempting appetizers, delicious side dishes, and a desert display that'll have your mouth watering. Best of all, each family member can eat as much as they'd like, all for one low price.

Bring the kids...the Easter Bunny will be here to greet 'em and treat 'em!

Easter Buffet  
11 a.m. - 4 p.m.  
\$12.95 adults  
\$5.95 children  
Discounts for senior citizens.

**Michigan Inn**  
16400 J.L. Hudson Drive  
Southfield, MI 48034  
Call for reservations. 559-6500

SPEND THE WEEKEND! SPECIAL \$49 per room, per night.