

# Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



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## Booking music for your merrymaking

By Cathie Breidenbach  
special writer

"Music hath charms". . . and sets the mood for any occasion. The Church and Courtyard Musicians of Bloomfield Hills books more than 30 professional ensembles that bring live music to events ranging from receptions under canopies in backyards to black tie extravaganzas under crystal chandeliers.

The difference between good live music and the canned variety is a bit like garnishing canapés with basil and mint freshly-snipped from the garden or making do with freeze-dried parsley from a jar. There's no contest.

Imagine the soothing sounds of a harp and flute duet accompanying the clink of wine glasses at your next sit-down dinner, or the fanfare by the brass quintet. "Today," to get the company Christmas party rolling with gusto, "Silver Strings," a string quartet and two violinists, at a silver anniversary celebration would make a memory to savor for another 25 years.

"Most of our groups specialize in classical music," said David Hansen of Church and Courtyard Musicians, "but some play the gamut from Joplin rags to Christmas favorites. We handle a few dance groups, but they're not our major booking. All our musicians are profes-

sals and many hold master's degrees in performance."

Church and Courtyard books some Detroit Symphony Orchestra musicians. Hansen, who is also music director at Prince of Peace Church in West Bloomfield, says wedding services and receptions are the occasions for which people most often book music, and "the trend at receptions is to play music people can talk above." A sampling of some of Church and Courtyard's most popular ensembles includes those mentioned above plus "Trio à la Mode"—piano, flute and cello, the "Christa Griz Trio"—harp, flute and doublebass, and the Cassini String Quartet.

If you would like to surprise your

guests with live music at your next gathering, Hansen will ask you to describe the occasion and your musical preferences. Then he'll suggest musical ensembles to complement your next holiday party, company shindig or graduation bash. He'll show you photographs and play demonstration tapes so you can see how the group you're considering looks and sounds.

Church and Courtyard provides clients with a contract that notes not only the date, time and place agreed upon plus the ensemble's fees, but also spells out details such as reports, waiting time and what dress the client wants musicians to wear.

Ensembles charge by the hour. The fee scale for the first hour is

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higher than for additional hours. A single musician might charge \$185 for the first hour sliding to \$85 for each additional hour of playing; a

duet's fee might be \$275 sliding to \$100, and a trio starts a \$450 for the first hour sliding to \$100 for each additional hour.

## Glib "God's Favorite" blessed with lively cast

Trinity House Theatre presents "God's Favorite" by Neil Simon. Fridays-Saturdays and 3 p.m. Sundays, Nov. 27-29, Dec. 4-6, 11-12 in the theater, 38840 West Six Mile, Livonia. Reservations must be made in advance by calling 464-6392. Admission, \$5. Trinity House Theatre is a non-profit organization.

Neil Simon's "God's Favorite," as currently presented by Trinity House Theatre in Livonia, may be one of the funniest plays you'll ever see about poverty, pain, hunger, and human suffering.

A modern-day version of the biblical story of Job, "God's Favorite" (here directed by Colleen Hackney) takes a look at Joe Benjamin who, as

the play opens, is a prosperous businessman living in a palatial home on Long Island, with his wife, Rose, their three children, and two rather muddled, but lovable, servants.

One evening, Joe is visited by a strange creature with a headache who, says he is a messenger from God. His message is simple: Unless Joe renounces God, he is in for some big trouble — and we're talking major league pain and difficulty here. After the family business is reduced to ashes and the family home has gone up in smoke, the ever-faithful Joe learns that he can look forward to hemorrhoids, constipation, impacted wisdom teeth, terminally-chapped lips, unrelieved itching, root canals, hunger, and a swollen

tongue, just for starters.

Greg Presley's Joe Benjamin is a kind of determined-to-be-cool-no-matter-what-happens type. Though his performance isn't seriously flawed, it might be just a smidgen more effective if Presley had chosen to go with a slightly more comedic interpretation of his role. That is not to say that he should play the part as a buffoon but, as is, Presley's Joe seems, much of the time, simply a straight man for the zany cast of characters around him and, as a result, his character sometimes threatens to pale in importance.

Gary Brda oozes Jewish charm as Joe's older son, David, a young man with an "attitude," who drinks too much and views his hapless family

as intellectually something less than baboons. Brda has some difficult moments in the third act, but the fault lies less with Brda and more with Neil Simon and his overly-pat conclusion to "God's Favorite," which particularly strains the credibility of Brda's character.

Too bad so many of her lines, especially in the last act, are unimagineable, otherwise, Sarah Hope, as the mysterious messenger from God who lives in Jackson Heights, is near perfect. Picture actor Charles Nielson Reilly on fast forward, and with a headache "this big," and you begin to get the gist of Hope's Sidney Lapton.

In minor roles, Beth Patton as the jeweled Rose Benjamin is, by



**Victoria Diaz**

turns, appealing and vain, and Laura Niesen and Jeff Hedden do a nice job as the Benjamins' servant couple, although Niesen has a tendency to needlessly shout her lines sometimes, a real distraction in this small, intimate theater. As the slow-witted Benjamin twins, Robert Zahara and Gayle Glowacki are a treat to watch as they race about the stage like two escapees from a com-

ic strip. Make-up, under the direction of Kristie Hass is well done, as are sound effects by Stephen Thompson and Mike Hackney, and costumes by Terry Tower Thomson and Debra Jackson-Burns. Victoria Diaz is a Livonia-based free lancer who specializes in arts and entertainment articles in the metro area.

## Classy soap entertains

Theatre Guild of Livonia-Redford presents Stephen Sondheim's "A Little Night Music" Nov. 27-29, Dec. 4-6 at its playhouse, 15138 Beech-Daily Road. For reservations call 522-8057.

Stephen Sondheim's "A Little Night Music" is two hours of musical fun that has more lovers, mistresses, affairs and intrigue than a month of daytime soap operas. And director Jim Ponsante has imbued the Theatre Guild of Livonia-Redford's live-action troupe of performers with just the right touch of playful naughtiness.

A few of the voices are marginal. No matter. Most are splendid, especially Nancy Villeneuve who along with David Howell, Jo Ann Visotsky, Chris LaFontaine and Mary Polsson might be likened to musical tour guides.

The play centers around a week-end in the country. Incidentally, that is the title of the shows one big production number. It is well done and imaginatively performed on the Guild's small stage.

The show pivots around a man (with a teenage son) who marries a young girl, (who is not ready to consummate the marriage). The man visits his mistress — and the ensuing complications rival a bedroom



**Bob Weibel**

farce.

TONY MATTAR plays Fredrik Egerman. He is amusingly frustrated as an older man with a young bride. Mary Nigohostan is teasingly nubile, as his wife, Anne, who wanted the idea of marriage, but not the realities of sex. Besides, she finds herself in love with his son, Henrik. He is something of a bumpkin with women, and David Podulka plays the role with imagination and skill.

Elsie Rippel is excellent as Fredrik's mistress, Desiree Armfeldt. There's a certain Bette Midler look and comic touch about her. She delivers a poignant rendition of the show's big song, "Send in the Clowns."

Rocky Harding plays Desiree's lover, Count Malcolm, with great aplomb. His big voice and comic opera gestures fit the part perfectly. Maxine Parshall is very good as his wife, Countess Charlotte Malcolm.

as she plans an affair to keep her husband in line.

Also appearing are Nancy O'Keefe (who is as adept in song as with a comedic line) David Rago, Carla Gray and Judy Pierson (who is very believable as the patriarchal grandmother with pithy comments). To paraphrase: Lovers should understand that affairs of the heart are often confused with illusions of the mind.

Warren Reinecker's set was well conceived, Maggie Lamb's costumes were excellent (especially the formal gowns). Max Wolf's lights were right on cue, and the orchestra under the baton of Glenn Carlos was never too intrusive.

Bob Weibel of Westland is a freelance writer who has spent more than 25 years in community theatre as a director, designer and performer.

### upcoming things to do

Deadline for the Upcoming calendar is one week ahead of publication. Items must be received by Thursday, to be considered for publication the following Thursday. Send to: Ethel Simmons, Entertainment Editor, The Observer & Eccentric, P.O. Box 3503, Birmingham 48012.

**SOMERSET MALL MUSIC**  
The Backstreet Trio perform Sunday, Dec. 6, in the Center Court, Somerset Mall, Troy. Jim Perkins and Anne Larson share wassailing and midwinter carols on Sunday, Dec. 13; Borkowski & Rosochacki offer holiday folk music on Sunday, Dec. 20; and Marvin Kahn Jazz Quartet entertain on Sunday, Dec. 27. The free concerts are at 1 p.m. and 3 p.m.

#### SOMERSET CHILDREN'S PLAYS

"Tarradiddle," a series of stories from India, Africa and Japan, are presented Saturday-Sunday, Dec. 5, at Somerset Mall's Center Court. "The Not So Grimm Brothers & Their Sister," updated fairy tales, are presented Saturday-Sunday, Dec. 12-13. "Goldwhoppers" consist of three tall tales from American folklore, shown on Saturday-Sunday, Dec. 19-20. Each of the free performances, geared for elementary school children, begin at 2 p.m.

**'A CHRISTMAS CAROL'**  
Meadow Brook Theatre presents its sixth annual production of Charles Dickens "A Christmas Carol" for four weeks beginning at 8

p.m. Thursday, Dec. 3, in the theater on the Oakland University campus. For ticket information, call the box office at 377-3300. An American Sign Language interpreted performance is set for 11 a.m. Tuesday, Dec. 15. There are 300 seats available for the hearing-impaired audience. For ticket information for this special performance, call 370-3318.

#### MADRIGALS

Cranbrook Kingswood School's Madrigal Singers celebrate the holidays at 8 p.m. Monday, Dec. 14, at Christ Church Cranbrook, Lone Pine at Cranbrook roads. Included in the program are Telemann's "Concerto in D Major" and Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus." Admission is \$3 for adults, \$2 for students and seniors.

#### AUDITIONS

Young children are needed to perform in "A Child's Christmas in Wales" Dec. 17-19 in Varner Recital Hall, Oakland University. Auditions will be 6:30-8 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 1.

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