

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



Thursday, March 30, 1989 O&E

OJSC

Getting the best

Guild's play committee searches out special shows

By Bob Weibel
Special writer

YEAR AFTER YEAR the Theatre Guild of Livonia-Redford presents some of the most stimulating theater in the Detroit area, or for that matter just about anywhere. Its shows are bold, varied and thought-provoking.

Judy Nakdimen, executive director, recently outlined the group's formula for success. Her comments were made against a backdrop of furious sawing and hammering, as construction workers busily transformed the stage of the Redford playhouse into New York's Central Park for an upcoming production.

TGLR is not your average community theater. This season (its 35th) opened with "Home," a sad but lovely character study of two old gentlemen in an asylum. That was followed with "Olympus on My Mind," a delightful spoof of the musical comedy genre, and "My Sister in This House," an extraordinary drama about a French murder case. About to open is "I'm Not Rappaport," a charming little comedy about two nonconformist but lovable old codgers on a bench in Central Park.

One expects that sort of season from a university theater or professional repertory company. Typical community theaters lean toward proven commercial hits (Neil Simon's "Odd Couple"), old favorites ("Charley's Aunt") and big splashy musicals ("Hello Dolly!").

NAKDIMEN SAID, "The guild's success over the years is a direct result of one important criteria that was established in 1954 by Pat Secor, the guild's founder, and executive director until retiring five years ago. TGLR would be an amateur theater that would always strive for professional standards."

To attract the best, TGLR pays its directors. And to assure good scripts, a rigorous play selection process is employed. It's so thorough, in fact, that in 35 years the guild has never repeated a show.

A play reading committee headed by the executive director recommends a choice of three seasons to the board of directors for approval.

A season usually consists of four shows, one of which is a musical and the others a mixture of drama and comedy.

A little quick math indicates that a minimum of 12 shows must be analyzed. What are the most important criteria?

"Two things are paramount," Nakdimen pointed out. "First, to find a good show. Secondly, to choose something not being done by everyone else. Our audience expects something a little different. So, we attempt to be first. Which means we take risks. We attempt things that are pretty nervy sometimes."

"WE DON'T TRY to offend people. But some excellent theater pieces have explicit language. And occasionally there is a bare bottom. In fact, 'Equus' involved full nudity, which we tastefully handled with body stockings and creative lighting."

Incidentally, the guild production of "Equus," presented at the 1979 Met Furay Festival, won awards for best production and best actor, plus runner-up awards for best actor and best supporting actor.

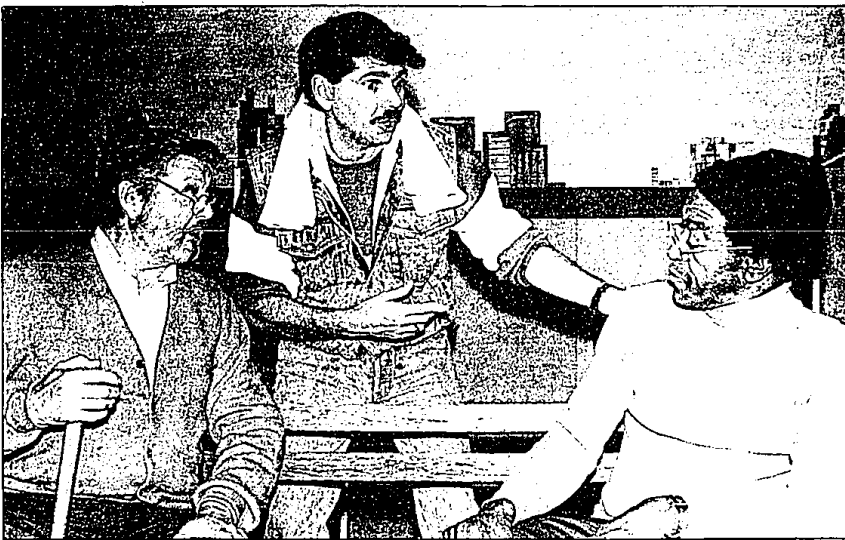
"We present what we like. What we think is good. We feel obligated to do shows with theatrical merit. We reject plays that use language or situations for shock value only," Nakdimen said.

Just where do you find what you like?

"We read the theater reviews in New York Magazine and Time. Pat Secor and myself go to New York and London, and to regional stages such as Actors Theatre in Louisville, Ky. They first produced 'Getting Out' and 'Talking With,' both of which won outstanding new play awards and were recently part of our season," she said.

"In fact, I saw the musical 'Nine' twice. First time just to enjoy it, the second time to analyze ways to handle the many period costumes and reduce the large cast. Our limited space places constraints on staging, technical effects and number of performers we can accommodate."

"IF A SHOW has possibilities, we order a script, which everyone involved in play selection must read. If selected, we call or write the publishers for permission to produce the



ART EMANUELE/staff photographer

Howard Egan (left), Richard Bulleri and Bill Malaotli rehearse a scene for the Theatre Guild of Livonia-Redford production of Herb Gardner's "I'm Not Rappaport." The guild is the first com-

munity theater group in the Detroit area to present the Broadway hit, which recently played the Birmingham Theatre.

play. As a rule, they won't give it to you during the first year the show is on Broadway, or if a professional company is performing within 50 miles of Livonia.

"Because we're always looking for new shows, the guild is usually the first community theater to present new works ('Equus,' 'Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolfe,' 'Stop The World!')."

Often the guild is the first and only community theater in the area to produce a show ("The Championship Season," "P.S. Your Cat Is Dead," "The Club," "Getting Out") and

sometimes this includes shows that even local professional companies haven't done ("The Dresser" and "Nine").

This season's "Home" falls into this latter category, and TGLR is the first metropolitan-Detroit community theater to produce "I'm Not Rappaport," which recently played the

Birmingham Theatre. "It's an interesting way to begin and end our season," Nakdimen said. "Both plays feature two men outdoors finding friendship in unlikely circumstances."

The cast of "I'm Not Rappaport" is directed by guild veteran Mattie Wolfe and includes Howard Egan as

Nat, Bill Malaotli as Midge, Richard Bulleri as Danforth, Jenny Betley as Laurie, Tyrone Franklin as Gillie, Laura Neisen as Clara and Dave Rago as Cowboy.

Performances will be at 8 p.m. Fridays-Saturdays, April 14-15, 21-22 and 28-29. For ticket information call 538-5678.

HE'S COOKED FOR THE QUEEN BY SPECIAL APPOINTMENT. BUT HE'LL COOK FOR YOU ANYTIME.



His cooking has won praise from Barack, Presidents and Prime Ministers. But he's also been known to make a mean meatloaf.

He's the celebrated Chef Wally. And you can now experience his wizardry with food in the Polo Club at the Berkshire Hilton of Ann Arbor.

Come taste what happens when a renowned European chef turns his genius to American cuisine. You'll find your favorite dishes have taken on a whole new pizzazz.

So has the elegant ambience of the Polo Club. Because we're now featuring Art Stephan, Ann Arbor's favorite pianist.

Call Christa at the Polo Club at 665-1311 today for reservations. Our Chef Wally will be pleased to create a miracle for you, on demand.

EXTRAORDINARY SUNDAY BRUNCH 10:30-2:30

Polo CLUB

THE BERKSHIRE HILTON OF ANN ARBOR
Luxury within your reach.

STATE STREET AT I-94
665-1311

HOSTED BY THE FIRST TRADITION OF ERIC VALE LUTZ & ASSOCIATES

NOW TWO LOCATIONS TO SERVE YOU!

FOR A TRUE ELEGANT EVENING OF DINING, LET US TREAT YOU WITH OUR CURSINE AND SERVICE SERVING: CANTONESE, SZECHUEN HOT & SPICY, EXOTIC DISHES & COCKTAILS

ROCHESTER HILLS: OCEANIA INN HEADQUARTERS: 2400 W. WALKER AVE. SUITE 1000 CORNER W. WALKER & WYOMING	WEST BLOOMFIELD: THE PANDA CHINA RESTAURANT & BAR 5500 GRAND RD. (AT I-94) CORNER WALKER & I-94
--	--

Bob Posch & Co.
Pocks Comedy Show Room
Fri. & Sat. Reser.: 280-2626

Campbell's Soups

1989 TOUR OF WORLD FIGURE SKATING CHAMPIONS

Gold, Silver and Bronze Medalists, from the 1989 World Championships in Paris and the 1989 Winter Olympics in Calgary!

Thursday, JUNE 1 • 8:00 p.m.
JOE LOUIS ARENA

Presented by TOM COLLINS

THE **Observer & Eccentric** NEWSPAPERS

TICKETS: \$20, \$18.50 & \$15 (available at the ticket office and all participating outlets on Friday, Saturday & Sunday)

CHARGE BY PHONE (313) 423-6666

GROUP RATES (25 or more) (313) 567-7774 General Inquiries (313) 567-6000
Call of tickets may change due to injury or other unforeseen circumstances.

Diann Orton Canada	Vitor Petrenko USSR	The Ducheneys France	Wilson and McGill Canada	JJ Tenary USA
-----------------------	------------------------	-------------------------	-----------------------------	------------------