

# Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



Thursday, January 11, 1990 O&amp;E

(T, R, S, F, T, D, O, R, O)

## Ron Richardson: everything's OK

By Ethel Simmons  
staff writer

Ron Richardson, star of the Gershwin musical "Oh, Kay!" at the Birmingham Theatre, is clearly a man who is happy with himself. And no wonder.

Everything has been going his way careerwise, including a recent trip to Japan, where he performed — in Japanese yet — his Tony-award-winning role of Jim, the runaway slave in "Big River." After Broadway and a national tour in that musical (based upon "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn"), Richardson was invited by Japanese producers to perform in his country.

"I secluded myself in Sag Harbor, Long Island for three months," he said. He had already taken Japanese classes before he and his coach settled down to intensive work for him to learn the language. Arriving for his interview at the Birmingham Theatre, the tall actor cut quite a figure dressed all in black, including his Russian-style fur hat. He had visited Leningrad, Riga and Moscow on a concert tour in 1986 and recently did a tour of the Baltic States, presenting "Concerts for the Earth."

The self-assured performer laughed heartily and regularly, as he spoke in his deep voice about trips behind the Iron Curtain and other high points of his renewed career. Richardson explained that he was successful, appearing in Broadway shows and nightclub acts until he hit age 30. Then, "I hit a dry spell."

When his luck turned, it was phenomenal. "I went from unemployed to a Tony award in 90 days," he said. "Big River" opened to rave reviews. "Thirty-five days later I got the Drama Desk Award as best actor in a musical," and the Tony award as best featured actor followed.

Including Broadway, the national tour and Japan, Richardson has done approximately 580 performances of "Big River."

**'We start rehearsals in August for 'Oh, Kay!' in Toronto, to kick off the national tour for Broadway. We hope to open on Broadway in the spring of '91.'**

— Ron Richardson

Last May, he produced his own show, "Songs in the Key of Stevie," doing songs of Stevie Wonder at the Village Gate in New York. This July, he will take the musical revue to Tokyo for three weeks.

Television viewers also may recognize Richardson who played two special parts — one on the comedy series "227," as a minister in a recurring role, and the other a 12-week stint on the soap opera "One Life to Live." Of the latter role, he said, "I played a good guy."

He enjoyed appearing on the daytime soap but said, "It was very difficult." Parts have been learned so fast. You only get the script the night before.

Richardson was anxious to talk about his current role in "Oh, Kay!" The scene of the musical comedy classic has been re-set in Harlem, and he plays a wealthy Harlem playboy named Jimmy Winter. (He can't seem to get away from Jim, Jimmy, and his next role will probably be a character named James, he predicts.)

For "Oh, Kay!" Richardson's name is above the title on the marquee, for the first time. His name also was above the title when he did the play "Paul Robeson" at the Kennedy Center, but he doesn't count that because it was a one-man show.

"It's wonderful to have your name above the title, but I'm also humbled by it," he said.

This is the actor's fourth trip to metropolitan Detroit. Theatergoers saw him at the Fisher Theatre as Sportin' Life in "Porgy and Bess" and with Eartha Kitt and Melba Moore in "Timbuktu," as well as at

the Masonic Temple in "Big River."

Before coming to the Birmingham Theatre, the current revival of "Oh, Kay!" was presented at the Goodspeed Opera House in East Haddam, Conn. Richardson said, "We start rehearsals in August for 'Oh, Kay!' in Toronto, to kick off the national tour for Broadway. We hope to open on Broadway in the spring of '91."

Originally written for a white cast, the musical set in the 1920s bootleggers' era has been reinvented by moving the scene to Harlem and a black cast. "It does show the many social strata in Harlem during Prohibition," Richardson said, pointing out there were two cultures in New York. "The transition was very simple. This show is not just dipped in chocolate. It takes on a real ambience."

He continued, "It's a look at black culture that we as Americans don't often get a chance to see."

Richardson said this is his first time on a professional stage to dance and to do comedy. "I love firsts. I love a challenge." He is thrilled by the opportunity to sing the Gershwin songs. "The reprise I sing of 'Someone to Watch Over Me' is one of the most difficult pieces of music to do." It's tough, in part, because it's "a quite, simple melody" rather than a belted-out one.

He praised his fellow cast members. "It's such a brilliant company," Richardson said. He also said, "The star of this show is the ensemble. It has some of the most exciting and exhilarating dancing I have seen on stage for a long time. The casting is perfect."



STEPHEN CANTRELL/staff photographer

Ron Richardson whoops it up outside the Birmingham Theatre, where he heads the cast and his name is above the title for the first

time, in the newest revival of the Gershwin musical "Oh, Kay!" The show's Prohibition-era setting has been moved to Harlem.

## upcoming things to do

● **Children's concert**  
Kim & Jerry Brodey will perform on their "Out of This World" family concert tour at 1 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 14, at Echo Park School in Blountfield Township. Tickets are \$12.50 for adults or for children. For more information call 851-1866.

● **Garden music**  
Just Friends, a folk group com-

posed of four women, will perform a wide variety of styles from old time and Celtic to ragtime and blues at Southfield's Concerts-in-the-Garden series Sunday, Jan. 14, at Prudential Town Center. Tickets are \$5 for concert and continental breakfast and \$3.50 for coffee and concert. Continental breakfast is at 10 a.m. and the concert begins at 10:30 a.m. For reservations and information call 354-

4717.

● **Drama-comedy**  
Birmingham Village Players presents "The Trip to Bountiful," a drama-comedy dealing with a determined woman's decision to return to her childhood home, Bountiful. Showtimes are Friday-Sunday, Jan. 26-28 and Feb. 2-4. Curtain time is 8:30 p.m. Jan. 28 is a matinee at 2

p.m. Feb. 4 is a brunch/matinee starting at 12:30 p.m. Tickets are available at the door, but reservations are recommended. Adult tickets are \$8; student tickets are \$6. Brunch/matinee tickets are \$15. Reservations may be made by calling 644-2075 anytime.

● **Winterfest circus**  
In conjunction with its annual

"Winterfest" celebration, Southfield's Parks and Recreation Department will present the "Southfield Winterfest Circus Spectacular" at 7:30 p.m. Friday, Jan. 26, at the Southfield Civic Center Pavilion. The circus features international stars, including three-time national champion trampoline artist Tim Kapp, and Yves Milord, former world games trampoline champion

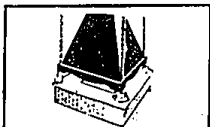
and international comedian from Montreal, Canada. Tickets for adults are \$10 (reserved seating) and \$8 (general admission). Tickets for children are \$6 and tickets for seniors (65 and over) are \$8. Tickets are available by calling the Mary Thompson Cultural Resource Center at 354-4717.

### Archus

#### ADAMS SQUARE

C • A • F • E • T • E • R • A

Take a  
**SUNDAY BREAK**  
and dine by a  
crackling fire...  
**CAFETERIA STYLE!**



Featuring a variety of A La Carte breakfast, lunch and dinner selections.  
11 a.m.-8 p.m.

Our wide variety and warm surroundings will surely make your experience a warm and memorable one.

Open Daily 11:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m.  
643 S. Adams • Birmingham • 644-1042



At last Help came, and Help knew what to do. In times of emergency, are you Help? If not, learn Red Cross First Aid where you work - or call your local chapter.



**JANES HAS TASTE**  
And TASTE has Janes---  
Read him every Monday

## Where will you be in the year 4788?

Celebrating the  
Chinese New Year on  
Feb. 1th at the  
Mon Jin Lau!

Join us for a celebration of the Chinese New Year. We will have a special menu of Chinese dishes, including Peking Duck, and a variety of other traditional dishes. We will also have a variety of other activities, including a lion dance and a fireworks display.

**Mon Jin Lau**  
215 EAST MAPLE RD  
TROY  
313-689-2312

## Dear Garfield, I hate Winter.

FEATURING...

1. A two-room suite. Private bedroom for Mom and Dad. Separate living room with sofa bed for kids.
2. Free, cooked-to-order breakfast every morning.
3. A complimentary manager's reception nightly.
4. Two TVs, three telephones and wet bar with refrigerator.
5. Indoor pool, sauna and exercise room.

**WEEKEND STARTING AT \$69\***

**EMBASSY SUITES**  
HOTELS  
DETROIT-SOUTHFIELD

28100 Franklin Rd.  
(313) 350-2000  
\*Price is per suite per night/night and Saturday only. Rates based on availability. \*Subject to state and local laws. Owned & Operated by the Management Group, Inc.

