

Entertainment

Ethel Simmons



C&E

C&E Thursday, March 28, 1991



Arthur J. Beer and Alexander Webb play leading roles in "Sleuth" which opens a four-week run at Meadow Brook Theatre at Oakland University in Rochester tonight. For information, call the box office at 377-3300.

'Patent Leather' is delightful production

The Village Players present "Do Black Patent Leather Shoes Really Reflect Up?" at the Birmingham Theatre. Remaining performances are at 8:30 p.m. Thursday, March 28, and Friday-Saturday, April 5-6. Tickets are \$9, student tickets are \$7. Reservations are recommended; call 644-2075.

Growing pains, the little triumphs and tragedies of childhood, are recalled with gentle good humor in "Do Black Patent Leather Shoes Really Reflect Up?"

The current production by the Birmingham Village Players features a wonderful cast in this engaging musical. The only flaw on opening night was painfully slow scene changes.

Although the play is set in Catholic grammar and high schools, the pangs of childhood are universally recognizable to "publics" as well as parochial school alumni. There are common fears of tough teachers, divine retribution for misbehavior, and ridicule by classmates if one is considered "different."

Act I follows eight boys and girls through grammar school and their worries about keeping the esteem of



Barbara Michals

members of their own gender. Act II shifts to the teen years and the problems of adolescent sex.

SOME OF the naive notions of youth come from the nuns, such as the infamous warning that girls should not wear black patent shoes because they reflect up. Others come from older siblings, such as the amusing idea that a girl will do anything a boy asks if he massages her elbow. "Thank God, we'll never be that young again," cast members sigh at the finale.

While the nuns and priests are gently satirized, the play makes it very clear that their warmth and understanding are always there when needed.

Tim Reinman as Eddie Ryan and Carollee Castle as Becky Bakowski

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'Turtles' writer finds success

By Dan Greenberg
special writer

IT'S BEEN quite a year for Todd Langen who, following his 1978 graduation from North Farmington High School, earned two degrees in aerospace engineering at the University of Michigan. And his success has nothing to do with rockets or space stations.

"Last year was phenomenal," Todd noted in a recent phone interview from his North Hollywood home.

He's currently at work on an original screenplay for a feature film, which he hopes will match the success of his first two produced works, scenarios for "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles I & II."

"Know what you want and be prepared to work for it, because it seldom happens by random chance or magic," is Todd's advice. That's exactly what he did, as recounted in these pages just under a year ago when "Teenage... Turtles I" was about to premiere.

"To get good at anything, you have to practice," as Todd tells it, and he wrote 20 or 30 scripts "on spec" — that's jargon for writing on the speculation that you may be able to interest a producer in purchasing your work. More often than not, only five drawers are interested.

IN LANGEN'S case, however, working on spec led to sale of a script for television's "Wonder Years" and soon a position as staff writer for the series. The assignment to write the "Turtle..." scenario followed.

Just before "Turtles I" opened, he received an Emmy nomination for the "Wonder Years" episode, "Coda" — the story of Kevin taking a piano lesson. That program also received another nomination as "Best Script for a TV Comedy Episode" from the Writers Guild — and it's especially sweet to be recognized by one's colleagues.

Last July, still another "Wonder Years" segment, "Square Dance," won a Humanitas Award for television writing, which "fosters understanding." In January of this year, "Turtles I" received the Movie Award as Best Children's and Family Film.

But Todd hasn't been sitting back counting nominations and awards. Because advanced test screenings were overwhelmingly positive, the "Turtles" producers, Golden Harvest, started working on the sequel before "Turtles I" opened.

As Todd noted, "it was for the obvious reason, capitalize on the Turtles phenomenon. Early last May when the "Wonder Years" season ended, I started working on the script for "Turtles II."



Todd Langen

"It usually takes a year to two, and it's very rare to get a sequel turned out in less than a year, but from conception to screen, "Turtles II" was less than 10 months," Todd noted.

We (Todd and the creators of the Ninja Turtle characters, Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird) spent a week in Massachusetts talking about tone and what elements to include."

FROM THE very first meeting with the producers, they were ex-

tremely sensitive to criticism received on the first "Turtles."

"Even though it was cartoon violence," Langen noted, "there was an outpouring from parents and critics. I feel that kids can distinguish between cartoon and real violence. The upshot was that we decided to be more creative and clever."

As this reviewer attested Monday, "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles II: The Secret of the Ooze" has lots of action and very little violence, and is clever enough that it won't be a painful experience for parents. The movie premiered in Detroit last week at the Showcase Cinemas in Pontiac with a benefit which raised \$2,000 for cystic fibrosis.

Todd spent last summer finishing the script for the film and then a week on pre-production consultation on location in Wilmington, North Carolina. He was on call throughout the production and post-production periods.

"The success of the "Turtle" movie was wonderful," Todd said. "It's given me the luxury to work on an original screenplay. But the greatest fun was sitting and enjoying with the audience."

"Then, I'd hang around the exits listening to comments. The best moment came when I heard a mother say to a distraught 3- or 4-year-old, 'But honey, the movie has to end sometime, it can't go on forever.'"

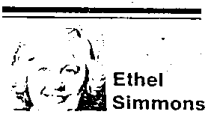
Shirley MacLaine sparkles at Fox

Shirley MacLaine dazzled Fox Theatre audiences with her song and dance show Thursday-Sunday. The multi-talented redhead performed as part of the AT&T Variety Series at the Fox in Detroit.

MacLaine took many bows after the opening night performance Thursday. Although she admits each leg is "27½ years old," the star who first rose on Broadway in the Bob Fosse musical "Pajama Game" in 1954 still has the ability to strut her stuff with the best of them.

The performer with a pixie face adorned her shapely, long-legged body in basic black, plus sunglasses. She wore a deep-necked gown, whose long skirt was removed to reveal a short skirt for a song-and-dance number. Later, for social dancing, that skirt came off and she was in a leotard.

Other routines changed the outfit



Ethel Simmons

with jackets and accessories to create many more fascinating costumes.

THE BROADWAY star and Academy-Award-winning actress treated the crowd to a "hooker-victim-doomed melody," after she explained that out of 39 movies she played a dozen or so hookers.

MacLaine has never played Mama Rose in "Gypsy," but she said it's the most complex, and challenging, female role in a musical. A range of emotions was revealed in the number where Rose

declares its her turn, and MacLaine sang powerfully.

One of the segments in the light-hearted, fast-moving show featured MacLaine and two energetic male dancers, Blane Savage and Keith McDaniel, in a tribute to choreographers. They took off on Fosse's attention to detail, and Michael Kidd's athletic approach for "Can Can."

THE THREE dancers also spoofed the Michael and Janet Jackson style of dancing and dressing with "attitude," on MTV. MacLaine praised Alan Johnson, who choreographed her show, calling him America's best and most sophisticated choreographer. Johnson's specialty is changing time signatures, which MacLaine, Savage and McDaniel then artfully demonstrated.

MacLaine had fun with her own

image and beliefs. "This is an incredible theater," she said of the lavish Fox. "Like one out of one of my old lives." Later in the show, she paused to talk about her experiences in Peru, where she received a personal mantra that led to — "Inka Dinka Do," "Gottcha!" she said, after completing the joke.

Other songs MacLaine sang, besides many of the hits from shows she has been associated with, included "I Ain't Nobody's Business," with personalized lyrics. She closed with Stephen Sondheim's "I'm Still Here," which she said paralleled many aspects of her own life.

More stars coming up on the Variety Series schedule are Steve Lawrence and Edgie Gorme, April 11-14; Roger Whitaker, May 2-5, and the Smothers Brothers and Tony Orlando and Dawn, May 16-19.

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