

# Actor shares 'the sound and fury' of Faulkner



Actor/playwright John Maxwell brings to life William Faulkner's humorous side as well as tragic in "Oh, Mr. Faulkner, Do you Write?" Thursday, Jan. 30, in Livonia and Saturday, Feb. 1, in Plymouth.

"Oh, Mr. Faulkner, Do You Write," 8 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 30, at the Livonia City Hall Auditorium and 7 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 1, at a dinner theater in the Mayflower Meeting House in Plymouth. Tickets for the Jan. 30 performance are \$5 in advance, or \$6 at the door. Dinner theater tickets, \$25, available at the Plymouth Community Arts Council office 322 S. Main. For reservations call 455-5260.

By Linda Ann Chomin  
special writer

Actor/playwright John Maxwell presents his one-man play "Oh, Mr. Faulkner, Do You Write?" at the Livonia City Hall Auditorium, 8 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 30, and at a dinner theater 7 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 1, in the Mayflower Meeting House in Plymouth.

"I ENJOY introducing people to the man," said Maxwell who performs the part in a soft, Southern drawl using some of Faulkner's personal belongings such as his pipe and hat as props.

"I read all of his novels, screen plays and poetry," said Maxwell, who spent six years researching the book, and six months co-writing it with Tom Dupree.

"I spoke with people who had known him for their personal recollections. The key was the letters. There was a volatility there about the man. I didn't start off with a

grand plan to it. It formed on its own as I began writing."

Set in the author's Mississippi den, the action takes place prior to Faulkner's receiving the Nobel Prize in 1954 as he wrestles with whether or not to travel to Stockholm to accept it.

"Oh, Mr. Faulkner" strikes a delicate balance between drama and humor as Maxwell's script focuses on Faulkner's human side. In one heart-rending scene, Faulkner reveals details of his brother Dean's death in an airplane. He blames himself because he bought the plane and paid for his brother's lessons.

"It's entertaining. It's not an academic piece. It makes Faulkner accessible to those who knew his work, and those who never heard of the man. He has such a dry, dark sense of humor. He's an abundantly rich storyteller."

TO SHOWCASE Faulkner's dry wit, the play travels back to the hard drinking author's unhappy screen writing days in Hollywood where his famous conversation with Clark Gable took place.

Gable asked Faulkner to name the top writers in America. Faulkner named them, and included himself in the list. Gable replied "Oh, Mr. Faulkner, do you write?"

Faulkner countered, "Yes, Mr. Gable, what do you do?"

The play ends with Faulkner deciding to go to Stockholm to accept the Nobel Prize because, as he puts it, he owes it to a lot of people who

have "waited a long time to be proud of me."

Like Faulkner, Maxwell was born in Mississippi. Maxwell graduated from the University of Mississippi with a master's degree in theater after completing undergraduate work in English. After a decade as a professor of speech and theater at a community college outside Jackson, Miss., he said he felt burned out. Taking a leave of absence, he applied for a grant from the Mississippi Arts Commission to write, "Oh, Mr. Faulkner."

The play made its debut in April 1981 at the New State Theatre in Jackson, Miss. Since then, Maxwell has taken the play throughout the United States and to 12 other countries including U.S. Information Agency tours to the Middle East and Africa. Later this year, he will perform in Japan.

"We're very excited to be bringing such an acclaimed performer to our area, and that so many people including students will have a chance to see this play," said Nancy Pilon, chairwoman of community programs for the Plymouth Community Arts Council which is hosting the performances.

The Jan. 30 performance is hosted in conjunction with the Livonia Arts Commission. Advance tickets are available at the City of Livonia's Department of Community Resources office in city hall, Farmington Road and Five Mile.

BESIDES MAXWELL'S two public performances, he will give theater workshops, and perform for students at Plymouth Salem and Plymouth Canton High School, Divine Child High School in Dearborn, and Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti.

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