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ON THE MARQUEE

Drama restores passion to history

Performances of the Jewish Ensemble Theatre production of "The Queen's Physician" continue through Dec. 27 at the Aaron DeRoy Theatre at the Jewish Community Center in West Bloomfield. For tickets, call JET at 788-2900, visit any Ticketmaster outlet or call 645-6666.



CATHIE BREIDENBACH

The romantic play, "The Queen's Physician," by Betty Neustat elaborates on the bare, cold facts of history and fleshes out events in the late 15th century when Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand ruled.

Five hundred years ago, Ferdinand and Isabella expelled the Jews from Spain. That's documented historical fact devoid of the anguish of the people who suffered during the Inquisition, devoid of the passion of Jews who refused conversion and worshipped in secret, and in danger. The Jewish Ensemble's production of "The Queen's Physician," restores flesh and blood anguish, zeal, and passion to history.

Director Dinah Lynch fills the stage with high drama in a stylishly theatrical and polished production of "The Queen's Physician." Billed as an historical play, "The Queen's Physician" is history only up to the point where imagination takes over. Fact: Queen Isabella had a Jewish court physician. Debatable history: they fell in love and had an affair while King Ferdinand was off fighting in Granada. "The Queen's Physician" may be shaky history, but it's lively theater.

Neustat's embellishments on history depict the lovers, Isabella and her physician Dr. Mendoza, in the



"Queen's Physician": Queen Isabella, King Ferdinand and Torquemada in a scene from "The Queen's Physician," now playing at the Jewish Ensemble Theatre.

queen's canopied bed chamber. A loud-in-waiting apies on their trusty a ghoulish churchman determines to torture or burn Jews and heretics; a cuckolded king plots revenge, and

romps with a giddy lady-in-waiting; and executioners torture Dr. Mendoza's son for rebelling against the Inquisition. Lynch sets a brisk pace in the ac-

tion-filled play that's imaginatively staged. Except for a graceful, but snail-slow dance in the opening

See DRAMA, B9

Chamberworks

Chamberworks presents Sonatas for Fortepiano and Violin 8 p.m. Friday, Dec. 11, at the Bellan Art Center, 5980 Rochester Road, Troy. Concert will feature Mary Richards, violin and Thomas Kuras, fortepiano. For tickets, call 643-7788.

Musica Viva!

Pianist Dickran Atamian performs at the Musica Viva concert 8 p.m. Friday, Dec. 11, at the Smith Theatre on the campus of Oakland Community College in Farmington Hills. Tickets \$15 to \$17. For information, call 473-2228.

La Casa

La Casa Folk Music Series presents Townes Van Zandt, 8:30 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 12, at the Birmingham Unitarian Church, 651 N. Woodward at Lone Pine Road. Tickets are \$10 in advance or \$12 at the door. Call 646-4950 for information.

Southfield Symphony

Southfield Symphony presents Rose Marie Floyd's Contemporary Civic Ballet Company performing Tchaikovsky's "Nutcracker Ballet," 3 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 13, at Birmingham's Southeast High School at Lincoln and Cranbrook Roads. Guest artists from the New York City Ballet will appear with the company. Tickets \$10, seniors and students \$8, call 354-4717. The symphony is hosting an International Holiday Festival, 2 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 20, at the Southfield Pavilion north of Civic Center Drive on Evergreen. Tickets \$5, call 354-4717 for reservations.

"The Messiah"

The St. Bede Players will perform the Christmas sections of Handel's "Messiah," 7:30 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 12, and Sunday, Dec. 13, at St. Bede's Church on Southfield Road at 12 Mile. Admission is three items of non-perishable food or \$3.

Chamber Choral

Chamber Choral presents an a cappella performance of carols and Songs of Christmas 8 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 12, at Episcopal Church of the Advent on Middlebelt, 1/2 mile north of Long Lake Road in Orchard Lake. The 20 voice ensemble specializes in unaccompanied choral music from the 15th to the 20th century. Tickets \$8. For information, call 642-2536.

Barbershop show

Holiday in Harmony, a barbershop show featuring the mens' City Lights Chorus, the Spirit of Detroit Sweet Adelines Chorus and guest quartets will be presented at Mercy Auditorium, 11 Mile at Middlebelt in Farmington Hills, 8 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 12. For tickets, call 383-1666.

Fine performances in American Artists Series opener

BY ISABELLE A. SMITH
SPECIAL WRITER

The American Artist Series began its 23rd season Sunday with a grand musical banquet.

For an appetizer, Master "chef" JoAnn Freeman presented a tasty morsel by American composer Herbert Howells (1892-1963), the "Rhapsodic Quintet, OPUS 21," which truly deserved its "rhapsodic" title — especially as served up by guest artist Theodore Oien, on clarinet, and the American Artist resident string ensemble — (Margaret Deslippe and Linda Snodden Smith, violin; Hart Holzman, viola and John Thurman, cello).

A graceful melodic composition, which truly explores the full tonal range of the composer's favorite instruments (strings and clarinet) as well as the performer's mastery of dy-

namic and rhythmic contrast, this deftly played tidbit whetted the audience's appetite for the main course — Brahms' "Clarinet Trio, OPUS 114."

One of the last four chamber works composed by Brahms (1833-1897) all of which feature the clarinet — this poignant, lyrical, introspective piece is a music gourmand's delight.

Clarinetist Oien, Thurman, cello, and artistic director Freeman, piano, showed the sometimes stolid and ponderous Brahms at his mature and intimate best: full-bodied, but not too rich, flavorful, but not overdone. And what's more, the "dish" was a true team effort.

Oien, of course, took some precedence in this lovingly crafted work, showing by his masterful legato line and exquisite arpeggios (as well as by his sweet, clear tone quality) why he holds the principal clarinet chair in

the Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

His colleagues were not to be outdone. Thurman played some throbbing soulful cello and Freeman displayed both passion and power at the keyboard, as they added their fine seasoning to the afternoon's musical entree. All three performers deserved the hearty and prolonged applause which awaited them.

After intermission, the string ensemble and Freeman whipped up a plummy dessert — Cesar Franck's lush "Piano Quintet."

First performed in Paris when Franck (1822-1890) was 56, this sensuous, emotional, richly romantic work must have amazed those who knew this Franck as a church organist and composer of religious music. It vibrates with far-from-religious sentiment, as the American Artist performers well demonstrated. In fact,

they handled the richly intricate chromatics, the dramatic dynamic and tempo contrasts and the sumptuous tonalities with such style (never once straying into the realm of the cheap or banal), that one wishes they had recorded it. The piece bears hearing again — as does the whole delicious program. By the American Artist Series performers, of course.

In fact, the American Artist Series Ensemble, like good wine, just keeps getting better as it matures. One eagerly awaits the treats to come!

The next American Artist Series program is 8 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 17 in Kingswood Auditorium on the Cranbrook Campus. For information, call 851-5044.

Isabelle Smith of Birmingham is a free-lance writer who specializes in classical music.



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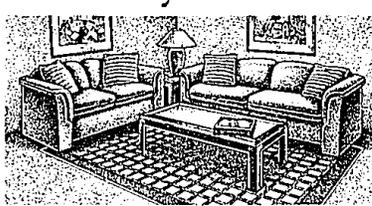
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