

ON THE MARQUEE

Trinity House

Trinity House Theatre features an evening of readings at "Lights Up!" 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, April 9-10, at the playhouse, 38840 W. Six Mile, Livonia. Tickets \$5, members and subscribers, free. "Quilters" continues through April 9. For ticket information, call 464-6302.

Folk

The Jewish Community Center of Metropolitan Detroit presents the folk recording group Gemini, 2 p.m. Sunday, April 11 at the center, 6600 West Maple Road, West Bloomfield. Tickets are available at the center and through Ticketmaster for \$4 per person. There is a maximum family charge of \$20. Call 661-1000 Ext. 345.

Oakland University

Oakland University's Department of Music, Theatre and Dance's production of "Cloud Nine" has been selected to participate in the 1993 Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, in Washington, D.C. April 23-24. "Cloud Nine" will have one benefit performance, 8 p.m. Thursday, April 15 in the Varner Studio Theater on campus in Rochester. Tickets are \$50 minimum donor status, \$20 minimum general admission, faculty and staff, and \$10 for students. For tickets, call 370-3013.

Opera

Schoolcraft College, 18600 Haggerty, Livonia, will present soprano Beverly Rinaldi in a free concert noon to 1 p.m. Wednesday, April 21, in the college's Forum Building Recital Hall, F 530. A "Meet the Artist" reception will follow the concert. For information, call 462-4400, Ext. 5225.

Group du jour

Back to the Future — subtitled "The Old World, The New World and Out of This World" this Blue-style Group du jour concert 8 p.m. Friday, April 23, at Marcy Center in Farmington Hills, includes pre-concert coffee hour beginning 7 p.m., and features chamber music from the Renaissance to avant-garde. For ticket information, call 478-2076.

Musica Viva!

SPELL-BINDING artistry of Cuban-born Manuel Barrocco, classical guitar, will be featured at the Musica Viva concert 8 p.m. Friday, April 23, at the Smith Performing Arts Theatre on the Campus of Oakland Community College in Farmington Hills. For ticket information, call 473-2228.

Romantic symphonies

BIRMINGHAM-Bloomfield Symphony will perform "Great Romantic Symphonies" including Brahms' Symphony No. 2 in D Major and Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4 in F minor, 7:30 p.m. Sunday, April 25, in the Sanctuary of Temple Beth El in Birmingham. For ticket information, call 645-BB50.

Fresh, exciting changes in 'Oklahoma!'

Performances of the Birmingham Theatre production of "Oklahoma!" continue through May 2. For ticket information, call the box office at 644-3533.



BARBARA MICHALS

How do you improve on perfection? On the 10th anniversary of the opening of Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Oklahoma!" director Worth Gardner at the Birmingham Theatre has staged an entirely new version that puts more of the real Oklahoma into this quintessential American musical. The new show is fresh, exuberant, and downright exciting. All of the wonderful, familiar melodies and lyrics are intact, but many are now orchestrated with an earthy, bluegrass country twang. Since "Oklahoma!" was the first musical to integrate fully story, songs and dances, Gardner goes one logical step further. The on-stage costumed musicians are also an integral part of the story, doubling as male chorus and some minor characters.

The fine cast is enormously pleasing, led by the strong, rich voices of Merwin Ford and Rebecca Baxter in the principal roles. Ford is Curly, the wholesome cowpoke trying to court the winsome Laurey (Baxter), who works hard at trying to seem disinterested, lest "People Will Say We're in Love."

Deb G. Girdler is refreshingly younger than most who play Laurey's Aunt Eller, the patronizing, self-righteous and good sense who dispenses advice to the lovers and forcibly reminds the stubborn farmers and cattle ranchers that it's time to put their traditional animosities aside now that Oklahoma is becoming a state.

Jason Edwards is perfect as Will Parker, saucy, egotistical, and lovingly dim-witted in his pursuit of the irrepressible Ado Annie. Charmingly played by Rebecca Hirsch, Annie is one of the all-time greatest characterizations in musical-comedy, the girl who "can't say no" to a "feller" and



Classic musical: Jason Edwards (Will Parker) and Rebecca Hirsch (Laurey) in a scene from the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical "Oklahoma!" at the Birmingham Theatre through May 2.

always loves best the one who's nearest at hand.

Howard Kaye draws laughs as the Persian peddler Ali Hakim, slippery as snake oil whether selling his wares or courting women.

As Jud Fry, the villainous hired hand who lusts after Laurey, Wade Williams disappoints because he's too appealing. He's neither dirty and hulking enough to credibly repulse Laurey nor outcast enough for the "Fore Jud Is Daid" number to make sense. Gardner seems to have deliberately made Jud and Curley more equal, the only change in the show that doesn't work well.

One change that really succeeds is the elimination of the tedious dream ballet that always slows down the

flow of the play. In Laurey's dream, Gardner has replaced the ballet with a cacophony of fragmented phrases from all the characters surrounding her on stage at once.

Jonathan Blakely's costumes lean toward earthiness, very suitable for the time and place, and Russ Smith's representational set works well except for the puzzling black backdrop.

From a very different staging of the opening number "Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin'" to the rousing finale of the title song, this "Oklahoma!" is intriguingly different yet satisfyingly familiar.

Among the numbers with the strongest bluegrass overtones are "The Surrey With the Fringes on Top," "Kansas City," "The Farmer

and the Cowman," and "All Er Nothin'."

Innovative director/choreographer Gardner, who successfully shepherded wonderful productions of "Man of La Mancha" and "The Wizard of Oz" at the Birmingham Theatre, as well as "Annie Get Your Gun," just seems to get better and better. "Oklahoma!" is a virtual icon in musical theater, without ever sacrificing the integrity of the original.

Barbara Michals is a retired Southfield English teacher. A theater critic for the last 20 years, she is an inveterate playgoer who regularly catches up on all the New York productions.

Concerts to feature pianist

Brazilian-born pianist Flavio Varani, at-in-residence at Oakland University in Rochester, will be featured in concerts on April 10 at Oakland University in Rochester, and April 18 at the Jewish Community Center in West Bloomfield.

He will perform Olivier Messiaen's "Quartet for the End of Time" with Trio Aventura, the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, and Oakland University faculty member Douglas Cornelien, clarinet, 8 p.m. Saturday, April 10, in the Varner Recital Hall on the campus of Oakland University in Rochester.

Trio Aventura is Flavio Varani, piano; John Fadial, violin and Beth Vanderburgh, cello. Tickets are \$10,

seniors \$8, students \$3. Call 370-3013 for ticket information.

The Julius Chajes Music Fund concert series will present Varani in concert at the Jewish Community Center of Metropolitan Detroit, 6600 West Maple Road, West Bloomfield, 3:30 p.m. Sunday, April 18.

The concert will be in the Janice Charch Epstein Museum and Gallery at the center. For concert and ticket information, call Annette Chajes, 661-1000 Ext. 352.

Varani began performing as a soloist at the age of 7. When he was 10 he began touring with the Brazilian National Symphony, a tradition that continues up to the present day. He is a renowned recitalist, chamber musi-

cian and guest artist with leading orchestras in the United States, Latin America and Europe.

As a teenager, he studied with the legendary Magda Tagliferro in Paris. In the United States he continued his studies with Rosina Lhevinne at Juillard and with Artur Schnabel and Dora Zaslavsky at the Manhattan School of Music where he won the "Harold Bauer Award" for the most distinguished pianist. Varani was first prize winner at the "Chopin International Competition" in Mallorca.

Varani has appeared at major music centers throughout the world, and



Guest pianist: Brazilian-born pianist Flavio Varani will perform on April 10, and at the Jewish Community Center on April 18.

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