

ENTERTAINMENT

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 30, 1993

4B(F)

ON THE MARQUEE

Supporting the arts is worthy resolution

Happy New Year! Make a resolution to be more involved in the performing arts. Dust off that clarinet hidden in the closet, buy some reeds, practice your scales. Playing an instrument is like riding a bike; once you learn how, you never forget.

If you're not musical, consider joining a theater group in your community. Audition for a part, volunteer to help behind the scenes or sell tickets.

Support community theater, orchestras and chamber groups by attending plays and concerts, or buy season tickets when they go on sale this summer and fall. Theater and music enriches our lives — don't miss out on the wonderful opportunities in your community.

The Ridgedale Players in Troy continue their 1993-94 season 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, Jan. 7-8, 14-15 and 3 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 9 and 16 with "Catch Me If You Can," a classical murder mystery/comedy. Call 433-1572 for tickets.

They're also looking auditions for adult singers and dancers of all ages for "Lil Abner" at the playhouse, 205 W. Long Lake Road Troy, (between Crooks and Liverios) 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 11. Call director Genie Garner, 852-2728 for information.

"The Wiz," presented by the Jewish Community Center with Nancy Gurwin Productions, opens 8 p.m., Saturday, Jan. 8. There will be shows Saturdays and Sundays through Jan. 30 at the Jewish Community Center, 6600 W. Maple, West Bloomfield. Call 661-1000 or 354-0545 for tickets.

Auditions for the Theatre Guild's production of John Steinbeck's "Of Mice and Men" are at 2 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 9 or 7 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 11 at the playhouse, 15193 Beech Daly, in Redford. Roles for nine men ages 20 to 70, one woman in her early 20s. Readings from script, call 537-4145 for information.

The Plymouth Oratorio Society is holding its first rehearsal 7:15-9:30 p.m. Monday, Jan. 4, at St. John Neumann Catholic Church, 4800 Warren. They are preparing for the May 1 performance of Stravinsky's "Symphony of Psalms," and Haydn's "Nelson Mass."

The Oratorio Society is open to all adults... singers and experienced high singers without audition. Robert Pratt has been the conductor of the group, which has more than 100 members, since its beginning in 1987. He is a graduate of the Oberlin Conservatory of Music and the University of Michigan School of Music.

Speaking of supporting the arts, if you haven't made New Year's Eve plans, consider spending an evening with family and friends enjoying top-name local entertainment, including Curvin and Michael of the Grammy Award-winning Winans, in an alcohol-free setting at First Night in Birmingham.

See MARQUEE, 5B

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Entertainment next week:

- Barbara Michals reviews the musical "Little Me" now playing at the Birmingham Theatre.
- Find out what's new at the movies.

Gender switch suits 'Little Me' star



BARBARA MICHALS

"Switching from a man to a woman was never a big deal for me. I'm not built like a big truck driver, and luckily I look good in a dress," said Charles Busch, an actor who has spent the last 10 years specializing in women's roles. "I took to walking in heels like a duck to water, though after a couple of hours it is excruciating."

Busch was speaking by telephone from New York where he is rehearsing for the lead in a revival of "Little Me," the wacky 1962 musical-comedy opening Dec. 29 at the Birmingham Theatre. The title character, Belle Poitrine, is a stage and film star from the wrong side of the tracks who strives to acquire wealth, culture and social status. Busch will play an older Belle, looking back at her life in a series of flashbacks.

Based on a book by Patrick Dennis, the author of "Auntie Mame," "Little Me" was adapted for the stage by Neil Simon. The Cy Coleman score includes the hits "I've Got Your Number" and "Real Live Girl." Director Worth Gardner has chosen non-traditional casting, with both men and women crossing gender lines to make the show more tongue-in-cheek.

An accomplished playwright himself, Busch is best known for starring in his own comic spoofs — "Vampire Lesbians of Sodom," "Psycho Beach Party," "Times Square Angel," "The Lady in Question" and "Red Scare on Sunset." "Vampire Lesbians" ran five years, the longest running non-musical in off-Broadway history.

Along with "some down-and-out friends who also wanted a career in

REVIEW

ON STAGE

"Little Me"

\*Theater: Birmingham Theatre, 211 S. Woodruff.  
\*Curtain time: 8 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays; 7 p.m. Sundays; 2 p.m. Wednesdays, Sundays and Thursday, Jan. 27, through Jan. 30. Special New Year's Eve performances 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m., Friday, Dec. 31.  
\*Tickets: Range from \$19.50 to \$37.50, available at the Birmingham Theatre Box office and all Ticketmaster outlets. Call 644-3353 or Ticketmaster, 645-6666.

theater," Busch formed his own company, Theatre-in-Limbo, in 1984. Now he has fictionalized an account of his career as a drag star and the success of his company in "Whores of Lost Atlantis," a comic novel just published in November.

"How 'Vampire Lesbians' came about is such a miraculous story, and I'd been exaggerating it so much in the retelling over the years anyhow, that I just had to write the story," Busch said. "Also I realized that by treating my friends as fiction, I could better expose all for their nuttiness."

For Busch, "Little Me" fulfills a fantasy because it's his first musical and he gets to sing five numbers. Though none of his own plays were musicals, he describes them as "musicals without music" because "the stories were so outlandish and the acting style so flamboyant." "Little Me," he said, is similar to the shows he has been doing for years.

Does a successful drag star aspire



A grand lady: Actor Charles Busch will portray Belle Poitrine in "Little Me" at the Birmingham Theatre. Busch is well-known for his performances in drag.

to play male roles as well? "I do worry, what if they don't believe me as a male?" Busch said. "The next play I've written for myself I will have a male role, and I will have a male role in a play this spring by a famous playwright. I'm OK as long as I stick to comedy. Recently I was in a production of 'The Maids,' an angry, bitter play, and the critics just didn't buy me in it at all."

Busch said his becoming a drag performer stems from growing up watching old films on television with his father, a movie fanatic.

"It always seemed my alter ego was a 1940s great lady. On stage I aspire to the elegance of Norma Shearer, the toughness of Stanwyck, the zaniness of Lucille Ball and the seariness of



Writer stars: Charles Busch, author of "Whores of Lost Atlantis," will star in the Birmingham Theatre revival of "Little Me" through Jan. 30.

John Crawford," he said. While Busch acknowledges that some drag performers can be demeaning to women, he said that the female characters he has created are a tribute to women.

"I play strong career women, I'm close with my two sisters, and there's certainly nothing grotesque or angry in my drag portrayals," he said.

Digressing for a moment from his usual light-hearted approach, Busch said that his motto is loosely quoted from Jean Cocteau: "Whatever is really old about you and other people criticize you for, mature it because that's who you really are."

Barbara Michals is an inveterate play-goer who regularly catches up on all the New York productions.

Show pays tribute to female singers

"Beehive," the hit musical tribute to the girl groups, pop queens and folk singers of the 1960s, has been extended at the Attic Theatre in Detroit.

"The response has been great," said Annette Madlins of the Attic. "We have a great group of women and the music is the best."

The show will continue through Feb. 6 with performances Thursday through Sunday.

"Beehive" takes the audience from a Christmas party at Leslie Gore's house to the streets of Motown, from a Greenwich Village coffee house to Woodstock. A cast of six local women perform the tunes that reflect the diversity of the 60s. Songs of the Supremes, Petula Clark, the Supremes and Janis Joplin are among those performed.

"It starts out really zany with the Annette Funicello and house parties and then moves into Mo-

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town with some of the really big female groups," Madlins said. "Finally, we get to the end of the decade with the really strong female performers of the time like Tina Turner, Janis Joplin and Aretha Franklin. The show is a powerful voice of the women of the '60s."

"Beehive" is directed by Westland resident Gordon Reinhart with performances by Melanie Parker of Westland and Colleen O'Shaughnessy of Troy. Bloomfield Hills resident Sabrina Childers serves as an understudy.

The cast also includes Valencia Eider, DeNita Ashbury, Beverly Coleman and Ellen Sandweiss-Hodges.

Musical direction is provided by Pamela Wise and choreography is by Andrea Lux.

"We also have a great band with Thomas H. 'Dr. Beans' Bowles on the saxophone," Madlins said.

Bowles is a Motown legend playing with the record company from the beginning. He shared with the cast stories of the Supremes, the Spinners and other well-known Motown performers, Madlins said.

Performances of "Beehive" are at 8 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays, 5 and 9 p.m. Saturdays and 2 p.m. Sundays. "Talk Back" sessions with the cast take place immediately after the Thursday performances. Student "Rush Tix" are available at half off the price, a half hour before curtain times.

Tickets are available at the Attic box office, 876-8284, and through Ticketmaster.



Beehive: The Attic Theatre in Detroit has extended performances of "Beehive" through Feb. 6. Ellen Sandweiss-Hodges of Detroit and Sabrina Childers of Bloomfield Hills are among those female performers paying tribute to the female singers of the 1960s.

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