

THEATER

Heartwarming 'Beau Jest' bubbles with laughter

By BARBARA MICHALS SPECIAL WRITER

Warm, abundant laughter permeates the current Meadow Brook Theatre production of "Beau Jest." The James Sherman comedy is impeccably performed by a wonderful cast and superbly directed by Geoffrey Sherman.

What's a nice Jewish girl to do when she fears her parents will never accept her gentle boyfriend?

Sarah Goldman (Linnea Todd) invents an ideal beau, a Jewish doctor, and hires actor Bob (John Seibert) to portray him for one family dinner.

Bob plays the role so well that Sarah's parents (Henrietta Hermelin and Robert Grossman) are crazy about him and pressure Sarah more than ever about the relationship. More complications ensue when Sarah and Bob really do fall in love, for Bob isn't Jewish either.

Todd is thoroughly likable and believable as Sarah. (The actress, married to the play's author, created the role when the show first debuted in Chicago). She is especially moving when

ON STAGE
What: "Beau Jest" by James Sherman through Nov. 17.
Where: Meadow Brook Theatre, on the campus of Oakland University, Rochester Hills.
Tickets: \$22 to \$32, call (810) 377-3300.

she tries to strike the right balance between her love and respect for her parents and her need to assert her independence.

Seibert's Bob is as irresistible to the audience as he is to Sarah and her parents. He's a down-to-earth, genuinely nice guy, sensitive, considerate and caring — the kind of fellow any girl would be thrilled to introduce to her parents. Seibert also hits terrific comic timing that comes to the fore each time he has a little triumph or near-miss in his impersonation.

As Miriam, Sarah's mother, Hermelin is the quintessential Jewish mother, well-meaning, but incessantly meddling. She's a perfect comic foil to Seibert who plays her complaining husband Abe. They

quibble over every little inconsequential detail but unite solidly in their love and concern for Sarah.

David Ellenstein is very convincing as Joel, Sarah's psychologist brother who is never quite fooled by Bob's impersonation of a doctor.

He is most endearing when he pleads with Sarah to confront the truth and quit using her parents as an excuse to hide her own doubts and weaknesses.

As Sarah's first gentle boyfriend, Chris Kringle, Wayne David Parker has a sincere delivery, but seems too unsophisticated for an advertising executive.

Peter Hicks' realistic set design for Sarah's apartment is easy on the eye, and Reid Johnson's lighting, Edith Leavis Bookstein's costumes, and Brett Rominger's sound design are faultless.

From the opening night audience's enthusiastic reception of "Beau Jest" one may surmise that you don't have to be Jewish to identify with getting yourself tied up in knots trying to please parents.



Season opener: Linnea Todd and John Seibert star in Meadow Brook Theatre's production of "Beau Jest" through Oct. 27.

Ridgedale Players shine in funny 'Little Shop of Horrors'

By HELEN ZUCKER SPECIAL WRITER

It's suppertime! The Ridgedale Players opened the season with a winsome production of Howard Ashman and Alan Menken's "Little Shop of Horrors."

Directed by Larry Pelliccioni and Deborah Cox, the cast delivers all the laughs and the poignancy as well in this script that has been playing some where for the past 30 years.

Tom Peterson shines as Seymour, the timid horticulturalist who loves Audrey. Seymour has had a bumper crop of life with his boss, Mushnik. He's known nothing but skid row, but it doesn't stop him from being the sweet guy who'd like a decent

life. Peterson plays Seymour as a guy who doesn't deserve to have a man-eating plant on his hands, but of course he does. Seymour and Audrey II have a battle of wills and it's obvious who wins.

Danielle Milton delivers a beautiful rendition of "Somewhere That's Green." It's a great song that tells you everything you need to know about Audrey and the size of her dreams. Milton carries off Audrey's affair with the dentist with a bowed head and small, clear voice. She's appealing.

Carl Jones as Mushnik, the flower shop owner who wants to close up shop until Audrey II appears and customers start jamming the phone lines, gives us a shambling wreck of a man who decides to adopt Seymour

On Stage
What: "Little Shop of Horrors" presented by the Ridgedale Players.
Where: 205 W. Long Lake Road, (between Crooks & Livernors).
When: 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 26; 9 p.m. Friday & Saturday, Sept. 27-28; 9 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 29.
Tickets: \$10 (Thursday); \$12; (seniors \$11, Sunday show). Call (810) 988-7049.

now that he's a grown man who might leave. His hypocrisy is blatant; so is his hard life. Kevin Lee Branshaw is hilarious and horrible and Ohin, the dentist who abuses Audrey, Branshaw and the Doo Wop

Girls give us one of the best numbers in the show in "Dentist." The energetic Branshaw takes off his leather jacket and plays Burstein, Mrs. Luce, Skip Snip, and Martin with equal aplomb.

Laura Kerr is always funny. As the customer who buys \$100 worth of roses, she lifts the energy level whenever she appears.

George Volenta is marvelous as the Voice of Audrey II. When Volenta hollers "Supportime!" we are convulsed when we should be shivering. Volenta is in total control of his great voice. Scott Joseph is equally at ease with movement on Audrey II. Joseph opens that great mouth with joy.

Diane Dillard, Sandy Grider,

Lori Jacobs and Annette See as Crystal, Shirrell, Ronnetta, and Chiffon, are in wonderful tune as the Doo Wop Girls.

Much credit to the band, Kerry Price on piano, and to the ingenious tech staff. Set design, costumes and choreography are all first-rate. Linda Pelliccioni served as producer.

Musicale presents Silver Strings

The Farmington Musicale will feature the Silver Strings Dulcimer group 7:30 p.m. Friday, Oct. 4 at Farmington Masonic Temple. Call (810) 477-2271 or (810) 615-4062 for information, and reservations. There is no charge, but donations will be accepted.

Women who love to sing, and can read a little music are invited to join the Musicale's chorus.

The group meets 9:30-11:30 p.m. Wednesdays at St. John's Church, 23265 Gill Road in Farmington.

The group will be hosting a 30th anniversary concert 7 p.m. Nov. 24 at North Congregational Church; a Cabaret benefit concert April 25 at First Presbyterian Church, and an Old-fashioned Ice Cream Festival, June 7 at the Finnish Cultural Center.

Pianist to showcase Polish composers at Oct. 6 concert

Pianist Leszek Bartkiewicz will present a piano recital featuring Polish composers 4 p.m.

Sunday, Oct. 6 in the Shrine Chapel on the Orchard Lake Schools' campus in Orchard Lake.

Community College, and has performed extensively in Europe and the U.S.

Tickets are \$10 in advance, \$12 at the door, call (810) 683-0428 for information.

Bartkiewicz is on the faculty at teaching piano at Macomb Fryderyk Chopin.

Plymouth Observer
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