

## THEATER

## Meadow Brook's 'Arcadia' amuses and intrigues



Comedy/mystery: Margo Skinner and Robin Chadwick in Meadow Brook Theatre's production of "Arcadia."

Meadow Brook Theater presents "Arcadia" through Saturday, April 13, 8 p.m. Tuesdays to Thursdays and 2 p.m. Wednesdays (\$22), 8 p.m. Fridays (\$26.50), 2 p.m. Saturdays (\$22), 8 p.m. Sundays (\$32), 2 p.m. Sundays (\$22) and 6:30 p.m. (\$26.50). Discounts available for students, seniors and groups, (810) 377-3300.

BY BARBARA MICHAELS  
SPECIAL WRITER

"It's wanting to know that makes us matter," states one of the characters near the end of Tom Stoppard's "Arcadia," a play of ideas that is both amusing and intriguing. Under the sure-handed direction of Geoffrey Sherman, the current production at Meadow Brook Theater features a strong cast with a sophisticated flair.

Set in the dining room at Sidley Park, an English country estate, the play alternates scenes between 1809 and the present.

The modern characters try to impose their own theories on the Park's history, resulting in some amusing misconceptions about the original events the audience has just witnessed.

In both time periods characters are seeking answers. In 1809 Thomasina Coverly (Dana Powers Acheson), daughter of the estate owners, is a 13-year old mathematical genius whose innovative theories amaze her tutor Septimus Hodge (Raul Esparza) and preclude modern mathematical truths.

In the present, Bernard Nightingale (Robin Chadwick) a visiting academic, adamantly pursues his erroneous theory about Lord Byron's link to Sidley Park, while Hannah Jarvis (Margo Skinner), fiancée to the estate's future heir, tries to unravel the identity of a hermit who once lived there.

Acheson, an 11th grader at the Roeper School, displays an enormously polished stage presence

as her Thomasina humorously reveals as much curiosity about sex as about mathematics.

As Hodge, the dashing tutor whom women seem to find irresistible, Esparza is suave and believable. Hodge is enamored of estate owner Lady Croon (Diane Van Fossen), who is herself enamored of Lord Byron, Hodge's visiting friend. Meanwhile, Thomasina is increasingly attracted to Hodge, as is the wife of Ezra Chatter (John Seibert), another estate guest.

Chadwick's portrayal of the narrow-eyed Nightingale is generally funny as he jumps about in glee, bangs his head against the wall in frustration, and generally mugs and grimaces through his emotional ups and downs.

In contrast, Skinner's Jarvis mostly maintains a cool detachment. As a researcher she demonstrates more inquiring skepticism than Nightingale could ever contemplate. However, Skinner seems too

sophisticated to be the fiancée of very unworldly graduate student Valentine Coverly (Raymond Fox).

Seibert is delightfully comic as the cuckolded, egotistical, would-be poet Chatter. Paul Hopper also amuses as Richard Noakes, the crochety landscaper about to transform the estate's classic, natural gardens into the very artificial, picturesque style of the romantic movement.

Mike Kopera, a promising eighth-grader from Troy, is fine as the mute Gus Coverly and his more talkative predecessor Augustus. Carey Crim is pleasingly pert as Chloe Coverly, sister to Gus and Valentine. Only Van Fossen's Lady Croon and Mark Rademacher's Captain Brice come across as more artificial than commanding.

Peter Hick's handsome set forms a fine background for his attractive costumes, both period and modern.

## JET festival showcases new plays

JET Theatre, in keeping with their mission to offer a forum for playwrights and their new work, will present The Seymour and Ethel S. Frank 1997 Festival of New Plays (In Staged Readings) 7:30 p.m. Wednesdays April 2, 9 and 16 at the Aaron Dury Theatre, 6600 West Maple, West Bloomfield, and Thursdays April 3, 10 and 17 at the Jewish Community Center, 15110 W. 10 Mile Road, Oak Park. No reservations. Tickets are available at the door and free to Jet subscribers with a suggested donation of \$5 per performance (or

\$15 for the series), \$3 with student ID. For more information call (810) 788-2900.

The festival serves as an annual platform for new voices. Jet, having conducted a nationwide search of more than 100 scripts, will showcase plays-in-progress by Adam Krar and Zanne Hall (New York City), Susan Merson (Los Angeles), Grant Rosenberg (Skokie, Illinois), and Rebecca Ritchie (New York).

These works in progress offer both the playwright and the audience an opportunity to be involved with their development.

Each performance includes a talk back with the playwright thus allowing the viewers to have a hand in the finishing of what could be very important new theater.

■ April 2 and 3, JET will perform two one-act plays: "The Last Ride on the Carousel," a thoughtful story of a developmentally disabled man and a day in the park by Hall, and "Black and White Together," a young white woman idealist rejected in her efforts to work in an African-American church and her sur-

prising link with the church's pastor makes for an intriguing play by Merson.

■ On April 9 and 10, Krar deals with a young woman reaching for her star who finds her reason d'être directly within her reach in "Princess of Presidents Street."

■ April 16 and 17, JET will present two one-act plays: "With Aches in Silence," a touching and whimsical story of loneliness and need by Rosenberg, and "Shiva Queen," a hilarious comedy by Ritchie.

## SINGLES CALENDAR

Send items to be considered for publication to: Sarah Takas, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150; or fax to (313) 591-7279.

## FARMINGTON SINGLE

■ Co-Ed Golf Leagues meeting/sign-up 7 p.m. Thursday, March 27 at Westbrook Golf Course, 26814 Beck Road just behind Providence Medical Park corner of Grand River, Novi.

■ FSP along with Metropolitan Single Professionals host "Single Mingle Dance" 8 p.m. to 1 a.m. Friday, March 28 at the Marriott Hotel, Six Mile east of I-276 in Laurel Park Mall, Livonia. Mail ballroom, D.J., cash bar and hors

d'oeuvres. Admission \$6/non-members. Attire dressy, men must wear coat and tie.

■ Red Wing Hockey, Friday, March 28, RSVP, \$34.50. Call now for ticket availability. (810) 851-9909

■ Co-Ed Bowling 5:45 p.m. and 7:45 p.m. every other Sunday at Drakeshire Lanes, Grand River east of Drake Road, Farmington. Cost \$12 per week (3 games). (810) 851-9909

■ Second City and Dinner 8 p.m. Saturday, March 29 at Second, 2301 Woodward near Montclair adjacent to the Fox Theater. Cost for dinner and show \$37.50. RSVP. Carpoolers meet in Orchard 12 Mall parking lot (12 Mile and Orchard Lake) near Comerica Bank at 7:15 p.m.

For availability (810) 851-9909

■ Co-Ed Softball League information/sign-up meeting 11 a.m. Saturday, April 6 at The Farmington Community Library, 23550 Liberty, just west of Farmington Road and south of Grand River, behind police station, Farmington.

■ Co-Ed Sand Volleyball League information/sign-up meeting 12 noon Saturday, April 6 at The Farmington Community Library. League games begin May 4.

■ Pizza and Movie Night 7:30 p.m. Saturday, April 6. Meet at Buddy's Pizza, 31646 Northwestern Highway just west of Middlebelt Road, Farmington Hills. Cost \$8 all you can eat pizza, salad, beverage. After din-

ner meet for a movie. RSVP (810) 851-9909

■ Biking/walking/rollerblading 11:45 a.m. Sunday, April 6 at Kensington Metro Park, I-96. Meet at the East Boat Launch in the second parking lot as you enter off the main parkway.

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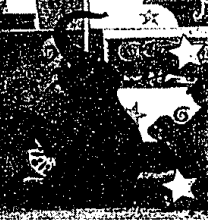
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