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two-hour class with the Radio City Rockettes when she was in 11th grade. "When I tried out for the Rockettes in 1996, I was newer to the audition process... The second year when I went back, I was a lot more familiar with the movements and what they wanted and what they expected out of us, so I had more confidence the second time around. "It's funny how I eased into everything. I did it so much for recreation when I was little and

never thought about it until later in high school that I really wanted to pursue it. I think that part of being a dancer is thinking about dance all the time — you wake up, you're thinking about dance. You hear a song on the radio, you think about dancing to it. That's when I began to realize that this is what I wanted to do. Dance often occupies my mind, so it was just the next step for me."

Watch Caston taking that next

step, seventh from the left. Erica Bromm is just two spots over from Caston — fifth from the audience's left — in the famous chorus line. Bromm, who's living with her parents in Farmington Hills during rehearsals and the run of the show, was working as a dancer in the casinos and waiting tables in Memphis. She went to the auditions in Nashville and was later cast for the Branson, Mo., "Radio City Christmas Spectacular." Because Bromm's entire family lives in Michigan,

she asked to be a part of the Detroit show and was granted her request.

Though she started dancing when she was 5 in Rochester Hills, Bromm was a competitive gymnast first, before giving it up during her freshman year of high school when her gymnastic meets started conflicting with her dance competitions. "I just enjoyed dancing a lot more, and gymnastics is really tough when you're my height,"

she said the 5-foot, 7-3/4-inch first-time Rockette from a Russian splits position on the floor.

"This is a workout in itself, these rehearsals. You can't tell, but we're all sweating by the end of the day. We all have sore muscles and blisters on our feet. Dancing is tough. We don't get the recognition that we deserve as being the athletes that we really are. Everyone thinks that it looks so easy. But that's our job, to make it look easy. We're

working really hard out there." That's why Bromm and Caston say they don't have to diet — though Bromm confesses an addiction to chips and dip. Any other tips for Rockettes wannabes?

"It's training. And it's training in all areas, because they require us to do tap, jazz and ballet," advises Bromm. "Being a triple threat — singing, dancing and acting — is what keeps you working in this business."

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and wigs which had become drab with age and made surgical changes in the script.

"There is a new scene," Lawrence said, in a telephone call from his New York office. "The authors put it in between 'The Master of the House' number and 'The Burgain.' There was always mention of Valjean meeting Cosette at the well and now he does."

The show has also been redirected, with an emphasis on personalizing the performances. Lawrence said the playing of the lead roles had been done by formula, every part played the same way everywhere. "It was important for the direc-

tors to see what the actors thought of their roles," he said. "Now the actor who plays Javert on Broadway will play it differently than the Javert on the road. By making it more personal for the actors, it becomes more personal for the audience."

Once the changes had been made on Broadway, Lawrence said, Mackintosh will play it differently than the show that has the changes incorporated in the road show. The total redo has cost about \$2 million.

"In Detroit we will be using a new sound system for the first time," Lawrence said. He said it will provide state-of-the-art fidelity and clarity. "Les Miz," as it is universally

known, is on its way to becoming the most popular musical of all time. One young Rochester actor said he has seen the show four times and looks forward to seeing it again.

Though based on Victor Hugo's sprawling novel, which is nearly 1,400 pages in most English-language editions, the song-through musical focuses on the core story of Jean Valjean, a potty thief hounded by a by-the-books detective, Javert. It is also the story of Fantine and her daughter, Cosette, whom Valjean agrees to remove from an abusive foster home. It ends with the Paris uprisings of 1830 involving Cosette and her lover, Marius.

"'Les Miz' is a great story," Lawrence said, "with great staging, music and performances. It's a great story of uplift and hope. If you lead a life worthy of being lived, you'll be rewarded. It's also the story of the beginning of the future."

Actually, it took me a while to find my way into the story. It's at the finale, where the whole cast backs away leaving Marius and Cosette. Those two people are the future, those people are the future of France."

Finding a personal connection is one of the things Lawrence and the directors are emphasizing to all new cast members. Lawrence said that Gregory

Calvin Stone has come up from the ensemble to take the lead role of Valjean. "He sings 'Bring Him Home,' better than anyone I've ever heard," Lawrence said. J.P. Daugherty represents another kind of musical style as the comic scoundrel Thénardier.

"He has that English music hall tradition that you don't find," Lawrence said. "He's funny as hell and conveys a different period."

Lawrence became involved with "Les Miz" after working on Andrew Lloyd Webber's "Sunset Boulevard" and Mackintosh's production of "Miss Saigon," another Boublil-Schonberg musical.

He said Mackintosh shows are the same on the road as they are on Broadway.

"If you see any of our shows on the road, you'll have the same experience visually, aurally and every other way that you'd have in New York," he said.

Lawrence is hoping the show's popularity continues long enough to overtake "Cats" as the longest running show in history.

"This show has no signs of winding down. We expect to be on the road at least five more years."

You can probably expect that Detroit will continue to be a regular stop.

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music. They drew on the blues, absorbed it and let it come out in rock 'n' roll. We do the same thing with today's black music which is hip hop," Gross said. "Rock 'n' roll has to have fresh flavors going on if it's going to survive."

The ingredients include rock ("Criminal Mind," "Funky Daddy"), a blend of funk and hip-hop ("Green Bottle"), hard-driving rock ("6th Street Opera," "Whack The DJ"), and old school ("It's My Party").

The album has already proved to be a hit locally. With its hook-

laden chorus "And it goes, and it goes, and it goes like this/Tm a high high hippie hippie yes I am," the single "Green Bottle," a song dedicated to Jagermeister, debuted at No. 20 on the list of top sellers at Harmony House stores.

"All the other bands (on the list) were national acts and we're selling as good as they are," Gross said excitedly.

Besides selling well, the single, mixed by Mike E. Clark of ICP fame, has received or is receiving airplay on Detroit-area radio stations WKRK, WRIF, and CIMX.

"It's tough for local bands to get airplay, the politics the way they are," Gross said.

For the album, the Howling Diablos worked at several studios including the White Room, 54 Sound in Ferndale, A&M in Hollywood, and the legendary studio United Sound in Detroit.

"That place is like the temple of funk. There's so much history there. George Clinton worked there, the Red Hot Chili Peppers cut there. There's an endless legacy of groups that have been there."

There was also an endless

stream of guest musicians — organ player Chris Codish, pianist Eddie Harach, guitarist Bobby East, drummer Jeff Fink, background vocalist Mildred Anderson, violinist Mary Alice, and drummer Vinnie Dombroski, lead singer of Sponge.

"We have Vinnie playin' drums on a couple of the songs. They all know him as the singer in Sponge. People don't remember what a great drummer Vinnie is."

Rapper Kid Rock, who recently inked a deal with Lava/Atlantic records, romanced "Reefin' Man" and provided drum loops for the album.

With the success of "Green Bottle" and its live album, the Howling Diablos have garnered some interest among major labels, Gross said whether the band signs a deal or not, the Howling Diablos will remain true to its mission.

"We're always gonna be a live band that takes it live to the peo-

Who: Howling Diablos along with special guests Holy Cows, Broken Toys, Mergo, The Almighty Lumberjacks of Death and DJ Bad Rockin' Brad
What: Perform
When: Wednesday, Nov. 26. Doors open at 8 p.m.
Where: Stato Theatre, 2115 Woodward Ave., Detroit.
How: Tickets are \$11 in advance and \$13 at the door for the 18 and older show. For more information, call (313) 961-5461 or (248) 645-6966.

Additional shows:
■ Howling Diablos, Megadeth, Jackyl, Jimmie's Chicken Shack, and Creed. Perform as part of the "Nightmare Before Christmas II" concert — 7 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 17 at The Palace of Auburn Hills, 2 Championship Dr. (I-75 and Lapeer Road), Auburn Hills. Tickets are \$15 and \$10 for the all-ages show. For more information, call (248) 377-0100.
■ Howling Diablos — 9 p.m. Sundays throughout November at The Bear's Den, 2972 Coolidge Highway, Berkley. Call (248) 645-2246 for more information.
■ Howling Diablos and The Parka Kings — 9 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 31 at the Magic Bag, 22920 Woodward Ave., Ferndale. Tickets \$20 in advance for the 18 and older show. For more information, call (248) 644-3030.

The Howling Diablos can be reached via e-mail at HowlingDs@aol.com or at <http://user.aol.com/HowlingDs>.

ple. Of course we'd like to hook it up (with a major record label). We do not depend on the whole major-label fix to survive. We're going to keep on doing what to do."

Hilberry serves up tasty family show

BY SUSAN SUCHYTA
SPECIAL WRITER

If there were a category for aromatic special effects, the smell of onions in ragu wafting through the auditorium of the Hilberry would win by more than a nose. The Neapolitan comedy by Eduardo Filipo runs in repertory through Jan. 30, call

(313) 577-2972 for ticket information.

If all the comedies of Italy's beloved playwright Eduardo de Filippo translate as well, it's a mystery why his works aren't performed more often in the United States. His simmer blend of family fare, flings, feuds and forgiveness make for a tasty theatrical treat.

The action centers around food and the family dining room, which sets the stage for the play's main course. Whether the food is being praised, prepared or relished, it is central to, and symbolic of, the nurturing of family relationships and friendships.

Mary Vinette embodied the passion and stubbornness of Mama Rosa, the family's matriarch. Her scenes with her husband, Peppino, ran the gamut of marital emotion, through anger, caring, guilt and jealousy. Bret Tuomi played the patriarch well, seething with a barely contained rage, frustrated by his own perceived powerlessness.

Rosa and Peppino's family pro-

vide a varied menu of side plots and entertainment. Antoinette Doherty was whimsically amusing as the headstrong daughter spurning her conservative fiancée's attempts to control her. And Karl Kippole's Luigi was obnoxious to the point of being amusing and not annoying.

The properties manager, Deirdre Bullock, literally had to double as chef and had the challenge of props that must be replaced for each run of the show. The smell of the onions really set the mood, though, and was an important part of the ambience.

The set was wonderfully detailed, creating a kitchen and dining room that were the central focus of the action and the welcoming arms of the home. The set establishes the intimacy of the family with its inviting kitchen and the importance of the Sunday meal with this formal, reserved dining room.

The period costumes from the '50s were also beautifully done as well, right down to the men's hats and women's pumps.