

# Rent from page E1

Theatre Department came out for the auditions - many having pulled an all-nighter at Kinko's, copying sheet music and prepping "Rent" songs - in case they made it to callbacks.

Heather Bell and Jamie Richards, who perform at St. Dunstan's Guild of Cranbrook and Nancy Gurwin community theaters, among others, came prepared for a long day of waiting. In the massive gymnasium-like registration room, they were bulking on carbs with Pepperidge Farm chocolate chunk cookies, Ritz Bits and Nutter Butters. Others imbibed on Gatorade, Diet Coke or water. Or munched on pretzels, apples, Einstein Bagels, potato chips, oranges and Schlitzky's Doli food from around the corner. Natalia Ross never goes anywhere without Kleenex and Ricola lemon mint lozenges.

When Hilary Hernandez

arrived at 7:30 a.m., she was 21st in line. The senior at Lake Orion High School also skipped class to be there. "But it's OK, because I've got really good attendance," she quickly chimed in.

With her Mariah Carey audition song firmly ensconced, Hernandez had been meticulously planning her outfit for the big day for over a week: "Something that would make me look somewhat older and like a role in the show."

The result? Hip-hugger faded jeans, black zip-up sweatshirt, heavy red crop top sporting the nonsensical words "Jet Curl" in lemon yellow type and her everyday silver hoop earrings peeking through her long, straight ash blonde hair. And a 1990 penny loafer good luck.

After all, it was lucky for Anthony Dixon of Lake Orion who gave Hernandez the penny

## BEHIND THE SCENES

after he survived the first cut. And when she made callbacks, Hernandez gave her just-met friend a 1989 penny in keeping with their newfound tradition. With his guitar in hand, Dixon belted out "Ziggy Stardust" by David Bowie.

"Do you know 'Amazing Grace'?" Heidi Marshall asked the baritone from behind her rectangular table in the third floor rehearsal room. "If not, just make up the words. Oh, you could just sing 'Happy Birthday.' But sing full out. I want to hear your range ... The thing that's important is to hit that high 'C.'"

Dixon did just that, in his olive green Detroit Technology T-shirt in the main room, others were singing solo in the stairwells and bathroom stalls. They sang a

African necklace with the gold beads and black leather strips that a fellow actor passed on to him, years ago when they were shooting a local film together. On his left wrist, he wore a weathered leather bracelet with seven white seashells that he got in seventh grade.

"It reminds me of my sister who gave it to me," said the 22-year-old Oakland University Shakespeare Sonnet Competition runner-up. "And if she hadn't loaned me her car, I wouldn't be here today."

While actors were doing group vocal warm-ups with Royal Oak musician Luis Resto at the piano in the main room, others were singing solo in the stairwells and bathroom stalls. They sang a

cappella. They sang with their "Rent" tapes and Walkmans. Sopranos, mezzos and more than three tenors.

Meanwhile, back in the third floor rehearsal room, beneath the ornate crystal chandelier, Marshall was taking copious notes: "Not sexy for (the character) Roger ... not quirky for (the role of Mark ... too squeamish ... too legit ... not of the 'Rent' world ..."

"Kill the vibrato. It should come from an easy, relaxed place in your gut," she directed. "A nervous actor in a reverse baseball hat. 'It's all about the text.' The text earned 'Rent' composer and playwright Jonathan Larson a Pulitzer Prize, just 20 days before 'Rent' opened on Broadway April 29, 1996.

Though Karen Newman of Franklin - the "Red Wings Own National Anthem Singer" - was

nursing a bad cold, she wasn't about to miss this audition.

"It's an opportunity that you can't just ever turn your nose up at," said Newman, who just released her first solo debut album, "Moment in the Wind," locally in Detroit. "I don't have any kids, and I'm at a point in my career where I can pick up and go where the work takes me."

If cast, they were all ready to pick up and go. All 700 of them. By the next morning, before barely making her 1:15 p.m. flight, Marshall had called back and worked with 40 potentials.

On Feb. 5, she came back with the show's director to further audition the final 15.

Of the 15, two will be making a trip to New York for final auditions. As of press time on Monday, the two people chosen were not yet notified.

Life as a "Rent"or could be a very good thing.

# Woman from page E1

It turns out that his lordship is actually the young man's father who abandoned his mother before the young man was born. She now calls herself Mrs. Arbuthnot and begs with her son not to accept the position. Meanwhile, the young man is in love with an American woman who represents all the puritanism, naivety and idealism of America. Cimolino is working with a young graduate school company who must master the problems of playing older, playing English and balancing comedy with melodrama.

"This is an educational institution, I have a dual responsibility - to the audience and equally to the actors," Cimolino said. "We make sure along this way we are all learning something. Also, we

have to look at what will pay off for the audience."

For Matt Troyer, who plays the son, Gerald, Wilde's language is the biggest challenge.

"Wilde uses wonderfully elevated English text," Troyer said. "He's well known for his epigrams, several of them from this show. But it's not unlike Shakespeare, you've got to bring out the language."

Unlike other company members, Troyer will not be playing beyond his years.

"When we're trying to act 40 or 45, we have to project what that's like. But when I'm playing a 20-year-old, I say, 'Hey, I've been there,'" he said.

Troyer came away with a new respect for Wilde, a controversial figure who was sentenced to two-

years of hard labor on sodomy charges.

"It's eerie how this play predicts the suffering he would go through. I have a better appreciation for the man. He's not just witty, but he has this darker side," Troyer said.

Sara Wolf of Rochester Hills plays the young American woman, Hester, whom she says moves from Old Testament to New Testament in her judgments of people.

"The way I see her she's very young," Wolf said. "I was just her age a couple years ago. I remember how idealistic I was, my ideal would change the world."

Wolf said her character has an opinion about everything, an empathy for the middle and lower classes and stands for both

the best and worst that Wilde saw in America.

Wolf doesn't have to master an English accent, but she does have to adapt a different voice.

"I'm trying to use standard American dialect and trying to weed out my Michiganisms. I'm trying to make the words beautiful without making them melodramatic," she said.

Cimolino said the play can be directed in many ways. The witty epigrams and high style of Lord Illingworth and his set can seem quite attractive opposed to the moralistic ideas of the other characters.

"You have to choose where you're going and where you're going to put the weight," Cimolino said. "You could make this really evil. ... You could make all

the good people dislikable and make the bad people interesting."

He said that oddly it is Lord Illingworth, who represents Wilde, himself, in the play.

"The point of the play is that in the end, he's made to hurt," he said. "It's very weird that he teaches himself this lesson."

Cimolino said he has been working with the cast since December to get the tone just right.

This summer he will be taking on a very different kind of writer when he directs Tennessee Williams' "Night of the Ignacis" at Stratford.

"Both were homosexual, or bisexual in Wilde's case. But one wrote in the 1940s and the other

in the 1890s and that 50 years' literally meant the difference between life and death," Cimolino said. "But both had a affinity for women, they wrote wonderful woman characters and both really liked women."

Cimolino is the son of Italian immigrants who grew up in Sudbury, Ontario, and graduated from the University of Windsor. He has performed as an actor at Stratford but over the last few years has moved into administrative work and directing. As associate producer he handles rehearsal and performance schedules and special projects.

His wife, Brigit Wilson, is an actress and they have two children, a son, Gabriel, 4, and daughter, Sophia, 2.

# Hilberry finds a 'level of importance' in Wilde's classic of betrayal

"A Woman of No Importance" by Oscar Wilde continues at the Hilberry Theatre, through April 23: The Hilberry is on the Wayne State University campus on Cass

between Hancock and Forest. Call (313) 577-2972 for show times and ticket information. BY SUE SUCIETTA SPECIAL WRITER

Oscar Wilde's play, "A Woman of No Importance" is the story of an Englishwoman in the late 1800s who, betrayed by her lover and rejected by society, raises an

out-of-wedlock child on her own. As the story begins, the child, now a young man, has been offered an important position by an influential man. Neither know that they are father and son.

The Stratford Festival's award-winning director Antoni Cimolino has assembled a talented cast. With ease and skill, the cast breathes life into the self-centered and self-sacrificing characters

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