

THEATER

Farmington Players present 'Fantastick' production

Farmington Players presents "The Fantasticks" by Tom Jones and Harvey Schmidt. 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, Feb. 12-13, Feb. 13-20 and Feb. 26-27; 2 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 14 in the Players Barn, 32332 W. 12 Mile, Farmington Hills. Tickets \$14, call (248) 583-2955.

BY BOB WEIBEL
SPECIAL WRITER

The Farmington Players' charming production of "The Fantasticks" by Tom Jones and Harvey Schmidt demonstrates why the musical ranks as one of America's most popular during

the past 40 years. This "little" musical has no dancers, no lavish sets and costumes, no need for booming voices — indeed none of the spectacle so in vogue today.

"The Fantasticks" is a simple story, simply told — an adult fairy-tale with a Romeo-and-Juliet theme.

Two naive young lovers seduced by the enchantment of the moon in Act 1 become older and a bit wiser in the ways of the world under the scorching sun in Act 2. Director Vos Spindler and his engaging troupe capture the spirit of the evening in splendid fashion. The

music under the direction of Choryl March is wonderful, especially the sensuous strings of the harp. Nice touch.

James Morisi is excellent in the dual roles of Narrator and seductive El Gallo. Early on, he describes the basics of the story — "A boy, a girl, two fathers, and a wall." In a rich, mellifluous voice he asks, "Try to Remember," the song most identified with the show.

A Mute, played superbly by Barbio Amann, sprinkles a little magic dust, and we are whisked away to an enchanted evening. Outfitted in top hat and black tights, Amann cleverly moves

about as an onstage "prop-man" providing whatever is needed to complete the scene. Very theatrical. Very good.

Stephanie Kaspera (Luiza) and David Sherline (Matt) are perfectly cast as delightfully young and innocent lovers. They convincingly portray that brief wistful time before adulthood we all remember — when the future was only limited by the extravagance of our dreams!

The young lovers have just one problem — a wall erected by their fathers to keep them apart.

Thomas Adams and Otto

Canis are hoot as the feuding fathers. It turns out the feud is an elaborate plot to assure the kids do the opposite of the parent's desires. They sing, "How clever we are to manipulate our children. A dog's got to bark, a mule's got to bray, and children, must have their own way."

They end the feud by hiring El Gallo to stage an elaborate abduction, complete with sword fighting in which young Matt is

allowed to think he slays the intruder. For this we need a couple of comic extras. Jim Snideman, as an old forgetful Shakespearean actor, and Jeff Wasserman, as an Indian who

specializes in dying, delivery funny and delightful performances.

Things don't always go as planned, however. Spring doesn't last forever. The lovers break up. Matt is off to see the world. He comes home bruised and disillusioned. The Narrator, disguised as a bandit, captures Luiza love then leaves her broken hearted.

Winter comes, bringing snow and wisdom, and the young lovers are reunited to a reprise of "Try to Remember" — "Deep in December, it's nice to remember, without a hurt, the heart is hollow."

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encourages students to confront obstacles in their lives, whether they are self-imposed or societal prejudices.

Ultimately, the program is to encourage students to develop a more positive self-esteem, according to Ann Fitzpatrick, spokesperson for Music Hall.

Opening up

Dance Theatre of Harlem has

scaled back since the late 1980s when they had 50 dancers, and could do "Giselle" at the drop of a hat, said Edward Schoelwer, company manager.

With a current group of 32 dancers, the nomadic New York-based troupe must tour regularly since they receive few subsidies, either public funds or private grants.

Over the past several years,

Dance Theatre of Harlem has made regular stops in Detroit, Washington, D.C., Miami and Cleveland.

Schoelwer calls Detroit a "legendary theatre town" with a loyal audience. He is also encouraged by the steadily increasing audiences.

"Many who come have never seen theatrical dance," he said. "They come thinking they're

going to see flat shoes, then we throw in a Balanchine piece and it opens them to the range of dance."

New dances

Each year, Dance Theatre of Harlem offers two different dance programs during their five-day performance at Music Hall.

A trip to South Africa in 1992

to celebrate Nelson Mandela's release from prison provided inspiration for Dance Theatre of Harlem founder Arthur Mitchell.

The new dance, "South African Suite," will feature the premiere North American performance of the Soweto String Quartet.

"The dance is indigenous sounds combined with classical

music," said Schoelwer.

Another new dance, "Sasanka," features the work by South African choreography Vincent Sekwiti Mantsoe.

The dance is a combination of animal-like and classical movements, according to Schoelwer. Mantsoe, a member of a South African tribe, also plays drums for his mother, who practices tribal medicine.

Favorite poem readings part of national project

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
STAFF WRITER
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Read your favorite poem to possibly become part of history on Sunday, Feb. 21, and Saturday, Feb. 27 at the Plymouth District Library.

The readings are among the hundreds taking place across the nation as part of Robert Pinsky's search for America's favorite poems. The Poet Laureate of the United States started his Favorite Poem Project last April to create an audio and video archive of America's favorite poems by the year 2000.

Readers will be allotted two minutes to read the poem and 1-2 minutes to tell why it's their favorite. The poems do not have to be published.

"We're trying to attract poetry lovers of all ages, not necessarily writers of poetry because we'd rather they read other people's song writing and literary poetry," said Dixie Cocagne, librarian.

Cocagne sent letters to middle and high school English departments in Plymouth and Canton public and private schools, local literary groups, coffee houses, bookstores, and Schenck College's poetry magazine to encourage people to read aloud their favorite poem and tell why it's their favorite. Readers will complete a submission form which

"Favorite Poem Project"
What: Readings of America's favorite poems. Part of a project started by U.S. Poet Laureate Robert Pinsky last April to create an audio and video archive of America's favorite poems by the year 2000.
When: 2 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 21 and 10 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 27.
Where: Plymouth District Library, 223 S. Main St. To register to read or for more information, call Dixie Cocagne, (734) 453-0750, Ext. 205.

will be mailed to Pinsky who'll select readers to record the poem of their choice for the archive.

The project, administered by the New England Foundation for the Arts with a \$500,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, is a partnership between the Library of Congress, NEFA, and Pinsky's Favorite Poem office.

According to Cocagne, the poetry collection at the Plymouth District Library is very popular, traditional as well as contemporary. Libraries, in general, have been important to Americans since Benjamin Franklin set up the first circulating library in Philadelphia in 1731.

"Poetry plays an extremely important role in our culture," said Cocagne. "Poetry is so very personal. Everyone at some time in their life has written poetry in their life whether it's a love note or a tribute to a family member who's died. We may not identify with the circumstances of the

writer but respect the writer's very intimate feelings."

Poetry's influence

Kathleen Ripley Leo, modera-

tor for the Plymouth readings, believes poetry impacts us in ways we've never thought. A poet, fiction writer and educator, Ripley Leo spends much of her time giving poetry workshops at such schools as Holmes and Case elementary and serving as poet-in-residence at Webster Elementary in the Livonia Public Schools district because she

believes poetry teaches children metaphorical thinking and therefore enhances problem solving skills. This March she serves as poet-in-residence at the

Manoogian School in Southfield and another high school in Whitmore Lake.

"The readings will give a showcase for the favorite works over the ages that have somehow inspired people," said Ripley Leo, who reads from her five books of poems at a fund-raiser for St. Mary of Redford School today at Laurel Manor Livonia. "What poets say impact across the demographic area. They impact our sensibility and common experiences that's why it's important to pay attention to

poems. At a young age, we start with nursery rhymes filled with wisdom and beauty of life that introduce people to language."

Dolores Musson is encouraging everyone who loves poetry to read at one of the library sessions. The Canton resident reads her favorite poem "Composed on Westminster Bridge" by English poet William Wordsworth on Feb. 21. Musson learned of the project while substitute teaching at Plymouth Salem High School where one of Cocagne's filers was posted.

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