

**THEATER**

# 'The Sound of Music' will stir souls

Plymouth Theatre Guild presents Rodgers and Hammerstein's "The Sound of Music" 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, Feb. 26-27, March 5-6; and 6 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 28 at the Water Tower Theatre on the grounds of the Northville Psychiatric Hospital (south of Seven Mile Road, west of I-275) in Northville. Call (248) 340-7110 for ticket information.

By SUE SUCHITTA  
SPECIAL WRITER

From the beautiful opening prelude of nuns from the Nonnberg Abbey to the ending crescendo of "Climb Ev'ry Mountain," the music in the Plymouth Theatre Guild's production of "The Sound of Music" will stir your soul and warm your heart. Even if you think you've seen "The Sound of Music" too many times, the strong cast and Lisa Andres' clever and skillful direction, infuse the delightful show with new energy, and give PTG its season's must-see production. Set in Austria in 1938, "The Sound of Music" is the story of Maria, a young novice who is sent to be a governess for Captain von Trapp's seven children.

She uses music to unlock their hearts and changes all of their lives forever.

Jenni Clark of Royal Oak as Maria, sang beautifully and was full of vibrant energy. Both the impetuosity and warmth she invested in Maria, as well as her chemistry with the youngsters in the cast, created a heartwarming character. No even a lightning snafu, which left her in the dark for the balance of "I Have Confidence," caused her to miss a note.

The von Trapp children are a talented troupe from their impish antics in "The Lonely Goatherd" to the hauntingly beautiful tones of the title song. Each child developed their distinct personality traits, from Caitlin Donovan's inquisitive Brigitta to Brooke Andrea's blossoming Liesel. Donovan is a resident of Farmington Hills, and Andrea of Livonia.

The other cast members include Jeff Ott as Friedrich, Emily Tar as Louisa, Paul Luoma of Farmington Hills as Kurt, Sarah Wierchoch as Marta, and Molly Donovan as Gretl.

Brooke's scenes with Jeremy Hargis as Rolf, the enamored telegram delivery boy, delivered a touch of innocence and magic. From Liesel's laughing entrance while perched on the handlebars of Rolf's bike, to the shy, yet flirtatious chemistry of the romantically choreographed and innocently sung, "Sixteen Going on Seventeen," is a young love in the air.

Nathan Kaufman as Captain von Trapp sang well, and captured the Captain's military reserve without sacrificing his warm affection for his children, and Maria. His voice, however, faded out at times, and some of his lines were lost to the house.

Toni Mough as Baroness Schrader, captured the upper-class mannerisms and vocal inflections of her character. She's also vocally talented. Mough lacked, however, the elegant visage and culture one associates with a wealthy and sophisticated baroness of the 1930s, with her evening gown being the single exception.

Joe Donovan appeared as the clever and scheming Max Detweiler. Jeannette Sowman as

the Mother Abbess thrilled the house with her soaring rendition of "Climb Ev'ry Mountain." Corinne Fine made the most of the comic relief she provided as Frau Schmidt.

The set, an engineering marvel of versatility, was dominated by the majestic backdrop of the Austrian Alps. Scene changes were swift and seamless with the startlingly effective use of a huge, rapidly unfurled Nazi banner as the scene segued from the Villa von Trapp to the stage of the Salzburg Festival.

The von Trapp family costumes, especially those of the children, were exquisite, during the epitome of elegance reaching the wedding scene, during which Maria carried Liesel. The tuxedo clad men among the party guests though were ill-matched by some of the Polyester-garbed ladies whose evening gowns seemed an afterthought.

Ursula, a von Trapp servant, would not have been so poorly dressed while serving elegant party guests.



Thriller: David Ellenstein and Denise Michelle Young in Meadow Brook Theatre's production of "Scotland Road."

## 'Scotland Road' sinks with its cleverness

"Scotland Road," Tuesday-Saturday, through Sunday, March 7, Meadow Brook Theatre, Wilson Hall, Oakland University campus, Rochester Hills; (248) 377-3300.

By FRANK PROVENZANO  
STAFF WRITER  
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From now on, any future discussions about the Titanic as a source of inspiration for a book, movie or play should be referred to "Scotland Road."

If ever a tale put to rest the notion that the sinking of the unsinkable ocean liner was a timeless story, "Scotland Road" is it.

In the end, the play sinks from an all-too-clever premise and the bloated promise of suspense. "Scotland Road," by the way, is a reference to the halfway passage taken by third-class passengers to the top deck on the doomed ship.

Despite some fine moments of acting, the cast and Meadow Brook director Geoffrey Sherman do not pull off the difficult task of delving into the popular mythology of the Titanic.

Instead, audiences are presented with a neat plot idea that author Jeffrey Hatcher stretched into a one-act play, set in the present.

The premise of "Scotland Road" is torn from the tabloids. A woman, who is found floating in the Atlantic, claims to be a survivor of the Titanic. Discard reason and the obvious absurdity. At least that's the course of the supposed grandson of a victim of the Titanic, the tycoon John Jacob Astor.

In a sterile gas station turned private sanitarium along the coast of Maine, Astor has confined the lost woman in order to discover whether she is telling the truth. A grueling interrogation conducted by Astor and an

accommodating psychologist is intended to reveal the woman's true identity and motivation.

Along the way, Astor is slowly convinced that maybe the woman is who she says she is. The twist is that Astor isn't who he says he is.

The success of this kind of dramatic sleight-of-hand, however, depends on whether audiences can empathize with the play's characters.

But initially, the play fails to draw any deep emotional connection to the audience. The story is told through vignettes, flashes of the interrogation and audio interludes of rushing water as the emotionally cool woman sits in an authentic early century deck chair.

Fortunately, Astor played by David Ellenstein begins to thaw as he reveals his need to discover how his supposed great-grandfather died.

Ellenstein hits the mark as he becomes more vulnerable, and the audience learns of his character's bizarre obsession with the Titanic tale.

Ironically, the woman who was discovered on an iceberg, played by Denise Michelle Young, slowly thaws and offers the most chilling and convincing accounts of the lost moments afloat the Titanic.

It's a tale of heroism, cowardice and injustice.

Of course, it's a story of which audiences have shown an insatiable appetite.

The strongest moments in "Scotland Road" are the insightful examinations of how the Titanic story has been clinically dissected by the mass media.

But ultimately, the play's unsatisfying climax renders any insight as a mere afterthought. "Scotland Road" never sees the iceberg ahead.

## Rivera mural is proud symbol of Detroit



ANN DELISI

**BACKSTAGE PASS**  
When you visualize the Detroit area, what icons come to mind? The Renaissance Center? The Motown Museum? The Spirit of Detroit sculpture? Maybe you picture something that's either dead or dying—like The Hudson's Building or Tiger Stadium. I've seen such monuments as the Joe Louis fist and forearm sculpture or (yikes) the big tire along I-94 used as a snapshot when our city is in the national spotlight.

If asked to choose a single image that captures the story of the Detroit area in a beautiful and moving way, I'd pick Diego Rivera's "Detroit Industry" murals at the Detroit Institute of Arts. That's why I'm eagerly awaiting the world premiere of a new Meadow Brook Theatre production running March 10 through April 4, and a special March 21 benefit performance in support of Detroit Public Television's Backstage Pass series.

A Gift of Glory: Edsel Ford and the Diego Rivera Murals at the Detroit Institute of Arts, a drama from the theatre's playwright-in-residence Karim Alrawi, is based on the true life relationship between Edsel Ford, son of auto baron Henry Ford,

and Diego Rivera, one of the greatest muralists of the twentieth century.

It was Edsel who commissioned the controversial Rivera to create the murals for the walls of the prestigious art museum, over the objections of his father. Given the turbulence of the Great Depression and the union movement of the 1930s, the murals depicted autoworkers struggling for dignity in an industrial environment. Imagine the lively discussions they triggered in the boardrooms and around the Ford family dinner table. Ultimately, Edsel's gift is a shining example of how the Ford Motor Co. built its legacy of outstanding contributions to the arts.

In an edition which premieres on Channel 56 at 7:30 p.m., Sunday, February 28, Backstage Pass

takes you on location to the Detroit Institute of Arts to celebrate Rivera's achievement, and visits Meadow Brook Theatre for a behind-the-scenes look at the production.

I hope you'll join me, Karim Alrawi, and the cast of A Gift of Glory for the benefit performance at Oakland University's Wilson Hall on March 21.

Ticket information is available by calling 248-377-3300.

Still smitten by the Valentine's Day performance by Maxim Vengerov in Ann Arbor is Madonna University's Dave Wagner, who also serves as Backstage Pass classical music host.

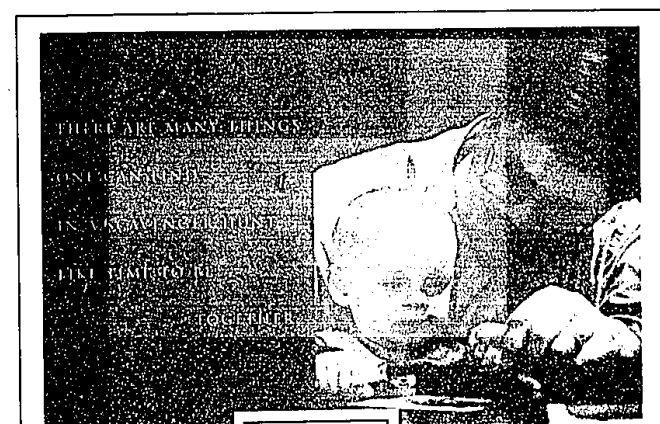
"Vengerov not only has great technique, but also the musicianship to go with it and a wonderful, charming personality, which

is a rare combination," he says.

The local visit by the 24-year-old Siberian violinist was a highlight of this year's classical offerings, as you'll discover by seeing him perform in a Backstage Pass rebroadcast Friday, Feb. 26, at midnight.

Speaking of highlights, how about the exciting announcement that The Three Tenors will perform at the soon to be obsolete Tiger Stadium this summer?

Staging such a high-profile event surely will boost the area's reputation as a center for the performing arts. It's also another reminder that such things as a sports stadium, a record company, a retail store, and a hometown brewery can go the way of the Edsel motor car, but the arts, if supported, endure.



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