

GUIDE TO THE MOVIES

THEATER

'Sunset Boulevard' cast fine, but musical is misconceived



Petula Clark

look-at-me Norma Desmond, who smoothes the moves between self-centered diva and insecure, aging, desperate woman.

In the production's best scene, a brilliant set piece that suggests what might have been, Norma returns to the auditorium to meet with Cecil B. DeMille. A lighting man from the old days sees her and bathes her in star's light and Norma sings the show's only memorable song, "As If We Never Said Goodbye."

But nothing else in the show has this power. Lewis Cleale has a strong baritone voice as Joe Gillis and is young and good looking. But his character has less force and power than the film version and something other than the moral weakness of Holden — it's too generic "the movie." The music becomes linden, repetitive and shrill.

The book and lyrics by Don Black and Christopher Hampton are misconceived as well, though staying close to the original plot and having several witty inside-Hollywood comments and allusions to other Wilder movies. But the tone is also too shrill, one-note and verging on a sloppy sentimentality that would make Wilder cringe.

This is the major problem with the production now at the Detroit Opera House. Despite some fine performances, dazzling sets and a genuinely distinguished source — the work is mostly tedious and at odds with Wilder's conception.

Petula Clark, the great pop star of the 1960s, is a radiant,

Andrew Lloyd Webber's "Sunset Boulevard" continues through March 21 at the Detroit Opera House, 1526 Broadway, Detroit 8 p.m. Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, 7:30 p.m. Sundays and 2 p.m. Saturdays. Tickets available at the Fisher Theatre box office and all Ticketmaster outlets. To charge by phone, call (248)645-6666.

BY HUGH GALLAGHER STAFF WRITER hgallagher@oea.hometown.com

Billy Wilder's 1951 movie "Sunset Boulevard" was a tough, brittle insider's take on Hollywood pomposity for using, abusing and disposing of talent. He brilliantly cast former silent star Gloria Swanson and renegade silent director Erich von Stroheim in roles that echoed their real lives.

Swanson's Norma Desmond was a real woman, hideous and nearly demented former star cast from the heavens — a true grand opera character.

But Wilder balanced Norma with William Holden as a cynical, sometimes brutal, young screenwriter, Joe Gillis, who becomes Norma's boy toy. His voice-over narration, as a corpse in a swimming pool, is a rich, dead-on parody of Raymond Chandler's Marlowe.

Andrew Lloyd Webber's highly praised musical version is a misconception. Webber obviously watched the movie and saw in Norma a perfect vehicle for his operatic musical style. But the other characters in the movie, even loyal, steadfast Max (von Stroheim character), live in the real world and are a contrast to Norma.

Webber instead gives everyone outside emotions in a score that

never lets up and rarely varies in tone or style. He resorts to regularly quoting himself and except in the sweeping Bornstein-episode overture rarely suggests "the movie." The music becomes linden, repetitive and shrill.

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BOOK HAPPENINGS

Book Happenings features various events at suburban book stores, libraries and literary gatherings. Send news items to Hugh Gallagher, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers Inc., 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150, or fax them to (734)591-7279 or e-mail to hgallagher@oea.hometown.com

SOUTHFIELD LIBRARY Eliot Wilhelm, director of the Detroit Film Theater at the Detroit Institute of Arts, signs and discusses his "VideoHouse's World Cinema: The Adventure's Guide to Movie Watching," 2 p.m. Sunday, March 14, at the library, 26000 Evergreen Road, Southfield.

EASTERN MICHIGAN Free Press sportswriter Mitch Allom speaks on "Tuesdays with Morrie: Lessons for Living," 7 p.m. Wednesday, March 10, free lecture at EMU's Pease Auditorium. For information, call (734)487-3045.

BORDERS (DEARBORN) Borders's play "Jack in the Beanstalk," 11 a.m. Saturday, March 13, at the store, 5601 Mercury Drive, Dearborn, (313)271-4441.

CRANBROOK Sarah Labiner will read from her debut novel, "Our Summer Sister," 7 p.m., Thursday, March 11, at the Kingswood auditorium, 1221 N. Woodward Ave.,

Bloomfield Hills. TRUTH BOOKSTORE Sheila Gregory signs her book "Legacy of Dreams," 5-7 p.m. Friday, March 12, at the store 21500 Northwestern Highway, Southfield.

GREAT LAKES BEST SELLERS

Bestsellers in the Great Lakes Region for week of March 1. Hardcover Fiction

- 1. Testament, John Grisham, Doubleday
2. Poisonwood Bible, Barbara Kingsolver, HarperCollins
3. Man in Full, Tom Wolfe, Farrar, Straus & Giroux
4. Clash of Kings, R.R. Martin, Bantam
5. Southern Cross, Patricia Cornwell, Warner
6. Be Cool, Elmore Leonard, Dell
7. In Danger's Path, W.E.B. Griffin, Putnam
8. Seize the Night, Dean R. Koontz, Bantam
9. Sudden Change of Heart, Barbara Taylor Bradford, Doubleday
10. Ransom, Julie Garwood, Pocket Books
Hardcover Non-Fiction
1. The Greatest Generation, Tom Brokaw, Random House
2. The American Way, Morris, Mitch Albom, Doubleday
3. How to Get What You Want and Want What You Have, John Gray, HarperCollins
4. Death of Outrage, William Bennett, Free Press
5. Life Strategies, Philip

McGraw, Hyperion
6. Sugar Busters, H. Leighton Steward, Ballantine
7. Conversation With God, Book 2, Neale Donald Walsh, Ballantine
8. One Day My Soul Just Opened, Ivarn Vanzant, Simon & Schuster
9. Healing Back Pain Naturally, Arthur Brownstein, Harbor Press
10. I'll Cook When Pigs Fly, Jr. League of Cincinnati
Paperback fiction
1. Message in a Bottle, Nicholas Sparks, Warner
2. Memoirs of a Geisha, Arthur Golden, Vintage
3. Jewel, Bret Lott, Washington Square Press
4. Charming Billy, Alice McDermott, Delta
5. Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood, Rebecca Wells, HarperPerennial
6. Where the Heart Is, Billie Letta, Warner
7. Street Lawyer, John Grisham, John
8. Storm of the Century, Stephen King, Pocket Books
9. Perfect Neighbor, Nora Roberts, Silhouette
10. Cat Who Sang for the

Birds, Jove
Paperback Nonfiction
1. Dr. Atkins New Diet Revolution, Robert C. Atkins, Avon
2. Protein Power, Michael & Mary Dan Eades, Bantam
3. Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom, Christine Northrup, Bantam
4. Chicken Soup for Couples, Jack Canfield, Health Communications
5. Don't Sweat the Small Stuff, Richard Carlson, Hyperion
6. Sugar Busters! Shopping Guide, H. Leighton Steward, Ballantine
7. October Sky, Homer H. Hickam, BDD
8. Dr. Atkins New Diet Cook Book, Robert C. Atkins, M. Evans
9. Gesundheit!, Patch Adams, Healing Art Press
10. Adventures of a Psychic, Sylvia Brown, Hey House

Compiled by the Great Lakes Bookellers Association whose members are independent bookstores operating in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio and other states in the Great Lakes region. Courtesy of The Books Connection, 19043 Middlebelt, Livonia.

Fisher presents 'Jekyll & Hyde'

"Jekyll & Hyde," the hit musical currently in its second smash year on Broadway has launched its national tour and will open at the Fisher Theatre for a limited engagement April 21 through May 9.

One of New York's biggest hits, "Jekyll & Hyde" features book and lyrics by two-time Academy Award-winning lyricist Leslie Bricusse and score by Grammy Award-nominated composer Frank Wildhorn.

"Jekyll & Hyde," the musical, brings to life Robert Louis Stevenson's classic story of the battle between good and evil. A whirlwind odyssey pitting man against himself as set in motion when the brilliant Dr. Jekyll's experiment backfires, giving life to Edward Hyde.

Chuck Wagner stars in the dual title role of Dr. Henry Jekyll and Mr. Edward Hyde.

Wagner originated the role when the show debuted in 1990 at the Houston Alley Theatre and broke box office records playing to sold-out houses.

Tickets are available at the Fisher Theatre box office and all Ticketmaster outlets. Charge by phone at (248)646-6666. Groups of 20 or more, call (313)871-1132. For information, call 872-1000.

Extensive movie listings for various theaters including National Amusements, Showcase, and United Artists. Lists showtimes and prices for films like 'The Matrix', 'The Mummy', and 'The Matrix Reloaded'.