

THE WEEKEND

FRIDAY

Celebrate Spring Farm Days at Greenfield Village in Dearborn. Learn about chickens, help clear the fields of rocks, and watch as farmhands shear sheep of their heavy winter coats, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., call (313) 271-1620 for information.

SATURDAY



Singer Nancy Wilson performs 8 p.m. at the Southfield Centre for the Arts, 24350 Southfield Road, Southfield. Tickets \$30 and \$35, available at Southfield City Hall, 26000 Evergreen Road, or call (248) 645-6666.

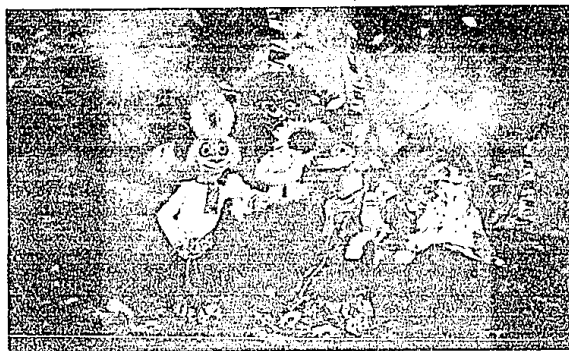
SUNDAY



Popular jazz flutist Alexander Zovkie turns classical for "Two Flutes and a Piano," a 3 p.m. concert also featuring flutist Ervin Monroe and pianist Margaret Kapasi, in the shrine chapel on the campus of St. Mary's College, Orchard Lake Road at Commerce Road. Tickets \$15 and \$25, call (248) 683-1750.



The John Hancock Champions on Ice 1999 Tour featuring Olympic and World Champion figure skaters comes to Joe Louis Arena in Detroit, Saturday, April 24. Performances 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. Tickets \$25 to \$55 call (248) 645-6666.



Rehearsing: PuppetArt members rehearse for their upcoming production of "Kolobok" at the Detroit Puppet Theater.

Professional puppeteer: Igor Gostman (below), artistic director of PuppetArt, Detroit Puppet Theater, holds one of the puppets used in the troupe's production of "The Story of Esther."

Theater showcases puppet art

BY KEELY WYONK
STAFF WRITER
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It's lunchtime in downtown Detroit on Tuesday. The sun is shining, the sky is blue, it's warm enough to walk around without a jacket, but there's no one on the corner of East Grand Boulevard near Woodward Avenue.

A fence surrounds the pit that used to be J.L. Hudson's across the street. It's a desolate scene. Alva Dworkin of Southfield waves to me as I approach what appears to be a vacant building, welcoming me to the Detroit Puppet Theater.

The theater is a dream come true for Igor Gostman and his wife Irena Baronovskaya of Auburn Hills, Natasha Khousid of Oak Park and Lyudmila Mikhayenko of West Bloomfield. Immigrants from the former Soviet Union, they met about seven years ago and formed PuppetArt, a troupe of professional puppeteers.

Inside the renovated space, formerly three storefronts, Mikhayenko is working with Diane Spratt, who recently joined PuppetArt, and Baronovskaya on a scene from "Kolobok," the Russian version of "The Gingerbread Man."

After a quick tour, Dworkin, who has been working with the group since 1995 and serves as its managing director, says "you know destruction is part of the creative process. Before you can create, you have to destroy. Think about it. An artist starts out with a blank sheet of paper, but until they ruin it, make a mark, it's just a blank piece of paper."

"I saw one of their puppets, and I was absolutely astounded," said Dworkin explaining how she met the puppeteers. "I knew they could be a big success."

A graduate of Cass Tech High School, Dworkin earned a master's degree in art education. She taught in the Detroit Public Schools and later nursery school. Before retiring she worked for the State of Michigan licensing nursery schools.

Dworkin is managing director of



PuppetArt and handles publicity, contracts and grants. "I beat the bushes to get jobs," she said.

It's absolutely a labor of love. "These are incredibly talented people who needed someone to help them," she said. Detroit has a long history of puppetry, and we're not just talking about the ones who pull strings at city hall.

The Detroit Puppeteers Guild, an organization devoted to the art of puppetry, was founded in 1946 and is affiliated with the Puppeteers of America Inc.

Puppetry is an ancient art. Puppets were found in Egyptian tombs. Haydn composed operas for marionettes, and Bernard Shaw wrote plays for them. Native Americans used puppets for magic effects and in religious ceremonies.

Dworkin introduced the puppeteers to the Guild, and they said, "these are our people."

Guild adviser Nancy Henk and her "Puppets to Go" performed at the Detroit Puppet Theater, which opened last July, on April 10.

"It's like a miracle in downtown Detroit," said Henk about the Detroit Puppet Theater. "In the larger downtown theater district you have this wonderful little theater devoted to puppets. It's been a dream for the people involved, and I've been happily watching their dream come true."

Dream

It's a dream that took over seven years to come true.

"I was a drama director in Leningrad," said Mikhayenko. She wanted to meet other Russian immigrants who, like her, were involved in theater in Russia. "I put up flyers in apartment buildings and other places," she said. Mikhayenko believes it was fate that brought the four puppeteers together. "I fell in love with the puppets," she said. "A puppet can do more than a live actor."

From the beginning, the group's

Please see PUPPETRY, E2

PuppetArt -- Detroit Puppet Theater

Where: 25 E. Grand River (between Woodward Ave. and Farmer St.) Detroit. Performances: Noon and 2 p.m. What: Premiere of "Kolobok," a Russian version of "The Gingerbread Man." opens Saturday, April 24. Performances at noon and 2 p.m. "Kolobok" continues noon and 2 p.m. Saturdays through May 15. Tickets: \$8 adults, \$8 children with the exception of the April 24 premiere. Tickets for this performance are \$6.50 adults, \$5 children. Proceeds from the April 24 performances benefit the Regional Puppetry Festival to be hosted by Detroit Puppeteers Guild. A puppet making workshop follows all performances. The cost is \$8 per person. Call (313) 961-7777 for information.

Detroit Puppeteers Guild "A Day of Puppetry"

When: 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Saturday, April 24 Where: Livonia Civic Center Library, 32777 Five Mile Road, Livonia. Cost: Adult registration \$32.50 (includes 8 month membership in the Detroit Puppeteers Guild). Detroit Puppeteers Guild Members \$25. Teens (ages 13-18) \$20. Register at the door at 9 a.m. Nancy Henk, (810) 463-0450. Highlight: There is a children's workshop performance package for children ages 7-12. Children will meet at 2 p.m. to make a puppet, then watch a 2 p.m. performance featuring magical surprises by the Amazing Clark, and Brad Lowe's presentation of "Rumpelstiltskin." There is a \$5 fee per child, registration limited to 25 children. Additional tickets for the 2 p.m. puppet show are \$3 each.

Jekyll-Hyde role challenge met by versatile actor

BY HUGH GALLAGHER
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Twenty years ago actor Chuck Wagner was there at the beginning for the musical "Jekyll & Hyde."



Chuck Wagner

The show went through various changes over time. In the mid 1980s, established lyricist Leslie Bricusse ("Oliver," "Stop the World I Want to Get Off") signed on to write lyrics and reshape the book.

In 1991 Wagner got his chance to perform the lead role on stage in the world premiere production at Houston's Alley Theatre. The show opened on Broadway in 1997 to mixed reviews. But it won a popular following of devoted fans who call themselves "Jekbies."

Wagner is now on the first leg of a yearlong national tour, playing at the Fisher Theatre through May 9.

Composer Frank Wildhorn has gone on to have wild success on Broadway with an astounding three musicals currently playing on the Great White Way — "Jekyll & Hyde," "The Scarlet Pimpernel" and "Civil War."

"I think Frank has a gift, the ability to write songs that are beautiful and emotional," Wagner said of his fellow USC alum. "You don't just hear them but feel them. But they're also simple and accessible to people."

The score includes the hit songs "Someone Like You" and "This Is The Moment."

Wagner has carved out a varied career since graduating from USC. He's performed as a regular on soap operas, appeared on "The Dukes of Hazzard," starred in a movie called "Automan" and performed in several successful stage productions including national tours of Disney's "Beauty and the Beast" and as Javert in "Les Misérables." He also

performed as Sir Lancelot opposite the original Lancelot Robert Goulet's King Arthur.

But the role of Jekyll and Hyde is a special challenge.

Please see JEKYLL-HYDE, E2

POPULAR MUSIC

Eminem is ready for controversy

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO
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Marshall Mathers, otherwise known as Eminem, strolls into Harmonie Park Studios in Detroit, the picture of insecurity.

His hands are pushed deep into the pockets of his baggy jeans, his blonde-dyed head of hair is pointed down to the ground. Mathers can't seem to focus, glancing quickly around the small studio.

Mathers was there to perform for the now-defunct alternative radio station WXDG-FM and its "Edge Session," something of which he was unaware.

"I came here this morning and absolutely had no idea what I'm gonna do because nobody told me. But I can do what I want to do," he said.

"OK, listen. If I'm gonna do some freestyles and I'm gonna do a show, I'm gonna do a little performance there, everybody's got to stand up or this will be very boring."

The studio pumps an instrumental version of Eminem's hit "My Name Is" through the speakers. Encouraging the sound engineer to turn it up, Eminem

Please see EMINEM, E7

Esham hopes to follow peers

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO
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Sitting back on a plush



STAFF PHOTO BY ELIZABETH GARDNER

Mixing it up: Detroit rapper Esham works the boards at Overture Studios in Novi.

couch in Overture Studios in Novi, rapper Esham Smith explains he's the real deal.

He described growing up on the mean streets of New York City and Detroit near Seven Mile and Hoover roads. Unlike Kid Rock and L.P., Smith said he doesn't call the suburbs home.

"When I talk about some (stuff) it's more real than when another (person) talk about it. They just playin'," he said of rappers from the suburbs. "We can't get over the fact that we come from the ruins. Detroit is ruins. I don't care what anybody else says," said Smith, who calls himself "an extreme realist."

"They should blow that

Upcoming performances

■ Esham performs during the Detroit Music Awards, 7 p.m. Friday, April 23, at the State Theatre, 2211 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Tickets are \$10, \$15 and \$25. For more information, call (313) 961-5451 or visit <http://www.statetheatre.com>

■ Esham will also headline Clutch Cargo's, 55 E. Huron St., Pontiac, on Friday, May 7. Call (248) 333-2362 for more information.

■ Eminem plays the State Theatre at 7:30 p.m. Sunday, May 23. Tickets are \$20 general admission for the all-ages show.

■ Also, the film "The Least World," the "official" Detroit hip-hop documentary, will be shown at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, April 27, at Alvin's, 5756 Cass Ave., Detroit. Tickets are \$5. Call (313) 832-2355 for more information.

■ Kid Rock is scheduled to perform on "David Letterman" on Tuesday, April 27.