

Brass from page E1

The 14-year-old annual event is held to celebrate music in public schools and links 8 million children in song worldwide.

The Brass also initiated the Fund for the Advancement of Musical Education, which provides grants for professional musicians to help in the continuation of their musical studies.

"We're so impressed and pleased with our relationship with musical education, especially brass playing," Watts said.

"We're doing something at the Eastman School and these guys have grown up with us. It's quite a responsibility and we're happy about the influence. What we discovered is that we do something that normal students can

identify with. They may dream about a symphony or a rock and roll band, but they see us play and think they can do it."

For the award concert, in addition to music from "Carmen," Watts said the group will perform Bach's "Tocata and Fugue" and music by Duke Ellington.

"Our new recording coming out May 18 is on the music of Duke Ellington. We're excited and proud of it," Watts said.

This eclectic mix is typical of the Brass. Though their classical credentials are extensive, they've also played the music of the Beatles, John Philip Sousa and Dixieland.

This is Ellington's centennial

year and Watts promises a different approach on this album.

"It was written and conceived by Luther Henderson who was associated with Ellington in the '40s on his classical pieces and did a lot of his arranging," Watts said.

The group has been invited to Harlem in the fall to perform a concert of Ellington music.

Despite the jazz label, Ellington's compositions, especially longer pieces like "New World Coming" and "Harlem Sunday," are as classical as anything by Gershwin, Watts said.

When Watts and tubist Charles Daellenbach founded the Brass in 1971 in Toronto the

idea was to create a serious classical brass ensemble.

Brass instruments were for color. String and woodwind ensembles were the usual classical mode. But it didn't take long for the Brass to develop a large and loyal audience.

The secret was playing seriously but also having some fun.

"At the early concerts we wanted to show what we could do," Watts said. "What we learned was to relate to and play for an audience, and we've never lost that."

When asked to name his favorite Brass albums, Watts again shows the eclectic style they've adopted.

"The Lennon-McCartney I really love. Our Bernstein, I loved the Wagner and 'Red, White & Blues,'" he said. "We're working on two exciting projects for fall. Recently we've been so 'crossover' that we're coming back to classical with a vengeance."

The Brass are especially prominent during the holiday season, when they are as ubiquitous as Bing Crosby and Gene Autry.

"It was an obvious thing, brass and Christmas. The Salvation Army has been setting us up for years," Watts said. "That's the busiest time of the year for us, from Thanksgiving to Christmas we're working every night."

A festive mood will also prevail for the awards activities. In addition to the public concert, a gala evening package is being offered that includes aperitifs, the concert, dinner and an afterglow.

Previous recipients of the UMS award, sponsored by Ford Motor Co., are pianist Van Cliburn, soprano Jessye Norman and pianist Garrick Ohlsson. The program raises funds for the UMS Education Program, which reaches thousands of children and adults each season through in-school visits, pre-concert lectures, master classes, teacher workshops, youth and family performances and additional activities.

Finale from page E1

non-musical role out of 13 productions. I like it because I have to be serious."

"Wait Until Dark" is serious, dead serious. Susy Hendrix might die if she can't outwit the three ex-convicts intent on retrieving a doll full of heroin from her home. Susy is unaware of its contents until master criminal Harry Roat Jr. enters the scene. Roat will go to any length, including murdering Susy, to recover the white "gold." Using the well-honed senses she developed as a result of the blindness, Susy must depend on Gloria (Wiercioch) to serve as her "eyes."

"There's a lot of scary stuff:

guns and drugs," said Wiercioch. But fear isn't in Wiercioch's blood. Stage fright isn't in her vocabulary either. If it were, Wiercioch wouldn't be well on her way to a career in theater.

Since attending a summer theater camp at age five, Wiercioch's already performed in the chorus of "Showboat" at the Masonic Temple, and as Little Red in "Little Red Riding Hood" at the Marquis Theatre in Northville.

Wiercioch hasn't limited herself to theater though. She's sung the National Anthem at all the Plymouth Whalers home games at Compuware Arena this season. In her spare time, Wiercioch models for print ads for

KMart. Her face can also be seen in the frames for sale at Kmart across the country.

A student at Our Lady of Good Counsel in Plymouth, Wiercioch in spite of three late-night rehearsals a week, is an honor student and a member of the track team.

"My husband and I, we're just drivers," said Susan Wiercioch, Sarah's mom. "School comes first to her. She comes right home and does her school work before she sees her friends."

Sarah knew at age four after seeing a friend perform in a play, that theater would play a big role in her life. Even though a veteran performer at her tender

age, Wiercioch knows she still has plenty to learn and she's depending on director Ralph Rosati to teach her.

Rosati's been directing plays since 1976. He knows the stage from both sides of the lights. He's acted in 31 productions himself. Rosati researched "Wait Until Dark" by renting the video of the 1967 film starring Audrey Hepburn.

"In this production, lighting has been a challenge," said Rosati. "The last two scenes it's dark, hence the title 'Wait Until Dark,' and it gets scary. There is violence. That's why it's not recommended for children under 12. It's very dark and tense, and

lighting is the key to making it all come together."

Keith Prusak plays the villain: the murderous Harry Roat Jr. The hardest part for him is being nasty to his wife Ariana. He plays Susy. They've been married two years. Their roles last season in the Plymouth Theatre Guild production of "Arsenic and Old Lace" had them playing lovers. They also acted in the recent SRO Production "Death Trap."

"I definitely don't want anybody to like me," said Prusak. "Roat is a social misfit. It's a duel between Susy and Roat to the death."

Ariana likes playing opposite her "real life" husband. A gradu-

ate of Lutheran High School in Westland, Ariana earned a degree in theater arts from Eastern Michigan University in 1994.

"I enjoy the last scene where I play cat and mouse with Keith," said Ariana. "It really does get scary. It just draws me into the fear."

Even though they're at each others' throats on stage, off stage, Wiercioch says "the other people I get to work with are really nice."

"We have a great group of people," adds assistant director Diana Wells of Livonia. "There's a bonding already."

Avon Players discover a 'lost' gem in 'Children of Eden'

"Children of Eden" will be performed May 7-8, 14-16 and 20-22 at the Avon Playhouse, 1185 Tipton, Rochester Hills. Performances start at 8 p.m. Sunday performances start at 2 p.m. In addition, there will be a 2 p.m. performance Saturday, May 8.

No performance is planned for Mother's Day, May 9. Tickets are \$18. For ticket information, call (248) 908-9077.

BY MARY JANE DOER
SPECIAL WRITER
Somewhere in the lush garden

of Stephen Schwartz' other musicals "Godspell," "Pippin" and "Magic Show" and his movies Pocahontas and the Prince of Egypt, the compelling musical "Children of Eden" has gotten lost.

Fortunately, the Avon Players picked up the scent of this rose

from the musical theater literature and has produced it with a "spark of creation" that places these thespians far above and beyond other companies. Like last year's heart throbber, "Blood Brothers," this production explodes with drama and real fire.

Karl Miller plays God, the Father, not with lightning rods and words of threatening destruction but with compassion and understanding. From the beginning, he exalts with his omnipotent voice in songs like "Let There Be" giving the show its momentum. Jeanne DeLong dons an angelic "Roma Downey" wig to be a charismatic Eve, carrying the first act's momentum. Her presence is electric, singing "The Spark of Creation," and her soliloquy is perfection. Pursuing that excellence, olmy Kevin Edwards creates the hissing snake dancing around Dennis in a sizzling dancing duet with DeLong. Terrific scene.

This modernized version of the Biblical story is given even more of a contemporary bent by Justin Morck as the angry young man, Cain, the first act's teenager who turns anger into domestic violence, killing his gentler brother, Abel, played by Matt Soisson, much to the grief of Adam, (David Podulka). Podulka doesn't have the center stage as much, but his "A World Without You" has magnitude.

That world is a set not unlike that for "Joseph and the Techni-

color Dreamcoat" with the chorus of storytellers flanking an enormous rotating turntable where the show's important action centers. There, Act I ends with Faust-like splendor as Eve is taken into heaven, leaving a sense of hope.

With Eve's death and Jeanne DeLong's subsequent departure, Act II might have lacked luster except that Kim Monterossa's voice as Noah is inspiring as is Mary McCune's voice as the servant Yonah.

Act I's spicy humor is missing in the more serious story of the Flood, but then the dialogue is more focused and the masterpiece qualities of the show's meaning comes through with songs like "The Hardest Part of Love" (a marvelous duet by Miller and Monterossa) and "I am no Stranger to the Rain" (McCune's impassioned solo). Act II also is highlighted by the march of the animals using Megan Bourland and Tina Vill

In Rochester, John Deierlein and his creative team of Judy Privacky and Tom Russell have found that tree of knowledge in this "Pursuit of Excellence," and the fruits of their labor is a show that no one should miss.

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