

Actors' Company presents 'The Emperor's New Clothes'

The Actors' Company presents "The Emperor's New Clothes," 2 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 21 and Aug. 22 at Trinity House Theatre, 3830 W. Six Mile Road (west of I-275, east of Haggerty Road), Livonia. Tickets \$10 adults, \$7 children and seniors. Call (248) 998-7032 for reservations, seating is limited.

BY KEELY WYCONIK
STAFF WRITER

kwyconik@eo.homecomm.net

Mike Gravame grew up seeing live theater. Knowing that a lot of kids don't have the same opportunity makes him sad and enough to do something about it.

On Saturday, Gravame will

have kids in stitches when his character, Mr. Stitch, helps the Emperor get new clothes in a delightful musical production presented by The Actors' Company at Trinity House Theatre in Livonia.

Livonia. Tickets \$10 adults, \$7 children and seniors. Call (248) 998-7032 for reservations, seating is limited.

"It's fast-paced, upbeat," said Gravame about The Prince Street Players LTD Production of "The Emperor's New Clothes," based on the classic tale by Hans Christian Andersen. The production, adapted by Jim Eiler, features lyrics by Eiler, with music by Eiler and Jeannie Bargy.

"The music is repeated a lot. Kids will walk out humming the tunes."

As a child, Gravame saw the show performed by The Prince Street Players at the Detroit Institute of Arts. In 1985 he formed The Actors' Company, which is presenting this show.

"I've always wanted to produce and direct," he said explaining how the company got started. "It's just something you're born with, I think. I like acting, but directing is what I really want to do."

In 1989 he started taking his shows on the road, touring northern Michigan opera houses.

His company is special, because they do both adult and children's shows.

"Discover the magic of live theater," is his wish for both adult and children's audiences.

"Kids today are bombarded by the media," he said. "Many have never seen a live theater production. They don't get to meet the actors after seeing a Disney cartoon. We meet and greet kids after the show."

Gravame especially enjoys children's theater because he believes it gives kids a chance to be kids and escape into a fairy-tale.

The costumes and set are bright yellow, pink, and teal. "All the characters are outrageous,"

said Gravame. "They're bigger than life. It's the kind of show I grew up seeing."

Stephanie Nichols portrays the Empress, and was Lady Winifred in the Prince Street Players production of the show.

"To me it's a story that works," she said. "It teaches a lesson to adults and children. There are a lot of adults who go along with the crowd and don't say anything that hurts their status."

In the show she dances, and blasts away on the trumpet, "dreadfully."

"It's so much fun to see faces and have the kids want to meet you afterward," said Nichols

explaining why she enjoys children's theater so much. "Theater is in our hearts and we want to cultivate a new audience."

Presenting a show is work, but Gravame says he's having a blast doing it.

"If you're not having fun, you're not doing your job right," he said. "Kids are honest. They'll know."

The Actors' Company will take their show on the road after appearing at Trinity House Theatre. If you're interested in having them perform for your group or event, call the number listed above.

Positive signs point to cultural awakening in Detroit

BACKSTAGE PASS



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DELISI

Attention-grabbing Detroit events such as The Three Tenors concert and the opening of the MGM Grand Detroit Casino undoubtedly lured many new or estranged visitors to the city this summer. But will they be back?

After all, the concert was a once-in-a-lifetime event in a lame duck stadium.

The windfall for the Michigan Opera Theatre and the boost in Detroit's reputation as a cultural center gave us something major to celebrate. Great for a Chamber of Commerce highlight reel, but the long-term benefits for area cultural institutions are difficult to assess.

Casinos generate such strong opinions that you can burn up a day just by raising the issue. Even time may not bring a consensus of whether gaming is an enduring source of revenue and excitement or a contributor to economic and moral blight.

I like to believe that Detroit is in the midst of a cultural awakening, but as a shameless booster and host of a weekly TV series about the local arts scene, the positive signs I see nearly every day may not accurately reflect what's going on.

So, on a beautiful mid-August afternoon, I let my mind drift as I drove down Woodward Avenue from Detroit Public TV's BACKSTAGE PASS studios. As I passed the New Center train station, I imagined I was a first-time visitor to Detroit.

That's right. I'm Norm from Chicago. Yep, just here to check out the casino and maybe get a peek at the new ballpark. Then, I'll grab a brat and a beer and be on my way.

What else do you have to show me in ten minutes drive to Comerica Park, Detroit?

Well, just past the Center for Creative Studies on your left, there's the cultural center. That's the Detroit Institute of Arts, and behind it is the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History. The Detroit Historical Museum and the Detroit Science Center are right here, too. Hammer. Not much traffic today. Orchestra Hall? Oh, it's the home of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. Pick a lane, buddy. I didn't know there was a Second City here, too. The Fox Theatre? Looks like quite a place. Hey, there's the ballpark. Right next to the Detroit Opera House. Maybe I'll circle around. I see on the Music Hall marquee that the Montreal Detroit Jazz Festival is coming up. What's this? The Gem Theatre.

All right, there is a lot of action outside the casino. But I also saw a lot of vacant, neglected lots. And you tell me this huge hole used to be a department store? And you broke the train in the air when you blew it up? It does give me a nice view of that big mural of Barry Sanders. Maybe if his team opened holes this big to run through he wouldn't have retired from football.

Norm's rating? Detroit, you're not perfect, but you're trying. Keep it up, and I'll be back.

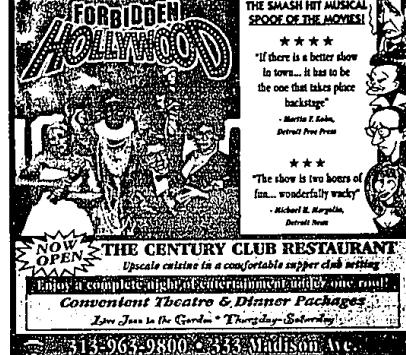
The drive is over, and it's good to be myself again. But I wonder how many people in the Detroit area would have their eyes opened by traveling the same course as Norm, the imaginary out-of-towner. Admittedly, there's plenty of "holes," but you can see an exciting plan taking shape. Most major metropolitan areas offer cultural attractions like the ones Norm discovered. But Detroit can stand out by being more affordable, convenient, and friendly.

Keep your promise to come back, Norm, and I just may buy you that brat and beer.

After a couple weeks off due to Detroit Public TV's summer pledge drive, BACKSTAGE PASS returns to the air 7:30 p.m., Sunday, Aug. 22, with legendary Detroit soul artists The Dramatics and new acoustic rock from The Luddites.

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• Located at Christian Memorial Cemetery, 521 East Hamlin Road, Rochester Hills (approximately two miles north of M-59 and just east of Rochester Road)

Schedule of Events

Friday, August 27

Flag Raising Ceremony-----8:00 a.m.

Opening Ceremony-----7:00 p.m.

Saturday, August 28

Flag Raising Ceremony-----8:00 a.m.

Wreath Laying Ceremony-----6:00 p.m.

Sunday, August 29

Sunrise Interdenominational Worship Service and Flag Raising Ceremony -----8:00 a.m.

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