

# Hilberry stages comedy about Golden Age of TV

The Hilberry, Wayne State University's graduate theater company, presents the Neil Simon comedy, "Laughter on the 23rd Floor" in rotating repertory through Saturday, Dec. 11. Performances at 8 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, with selected 2 p.m. matinees Wednesday and Saturday. The Hilberry Theatre is at 4743 Cass, at Hancock, on the campus of Wayne State University in Detroit. The play contains adult situations and language. For more information or to order tickets by phone, call (313) 577-2872.

BY SUZ SUCHYTA  
SPECIAL WRITER

"Laughter on the 23rd Floor" is a semi-autobiographical comic romp through Neil Simon's early days as a writer on Sid Caesar's "Your Show of Shows." Mix seven high strung but talented writers, throw in uncertain ratings, the Cold War and McCarthyism, and

season with Jewish humor, and the once liners come fast and furious.

A step above vaudeville, and the predecessors of Seinfeld and Billy Crystal, the humor is cerebral and somewhat dated, yet engaging and human.

Dallas Henry plays Lucas, Neil Simon's alter-ego, a newcomer to the writing team and the story's occasional narrator. Henry captured an interesting blend of insecurity and emerging confidence of a young man on the verge of making a mark for himself as a comedy writer. As the story progressed, the character Lucas became less of an observer and more of a co-conspirator in the pranks and subterfuges which were a byproduct of the tension of creating a consistently funny show week after week.

Milt, played by Christopher Yoder, is a high-strung, philan-

dering rake who unwittingly wears his insecurities as visibly as the loud clothing he adopts to capture attention. He alternates between being arrogant and needy. His barbs and insults become jokes in of themselves. Vocationally he captures his character's tension with an edgy, staccato delivery.

Chad Smith portrays Val, the senior writer and supervisor, with a fatherly air, and captures the expatriate spirit of resignation, humor and outrage in a frumpy but self-possessed character. Likewise, Sean Ramsey's tobacco addicted Brian, the only Christian in the bunch, is a feisty yet intellectually sharp Irishman with an ability to hold his own with his wit despite his unimposing physique.

Christopher Gilbert's portrayal of Kenny comes across as a politically smooth golden boy, the one who smooths things over with

the boss and tries to keep the other powder keg personalities from exploding. He carried himself with the conservative air of a secret service agent. Carol, played by Triha Miller, portrays the lone woman writer with an interesting blend of ladylike behavior and pre-feminism moxy. She held her own with the fellows without being strident, and managed to keep up with the fast and further banter and verbal volleys.

In contrast, understudy Heidi Olson has fun with the role of the flighty secretary, Helen.

Fred Shabadi met the challenge of the intense and high strung Max Prince well.

He integrated the character's abuse of alcohol and prescription pills into the story line with losing the character's inherent dignity. Instead, the character's pain and anguish come across

with the desperate dignity of a man struggling to hold his show together in the face of demands to compromise its style and finesse.

Ira, played by Gavin Lewis, provides comic relief as the demonstrative hypochondriac who regularly regales his irritated colleagues with his disease of the day. His rabid insecurities add to his charm in a convoluted way, redeemed by his surprising clear and startlingly good comedic brilliance.

Ethnic humor was a major player, and thrown back and forth with an ease that would wreck havoc in a nineties office. Political correctness was reserved for any reference to McCarthy or communism, whose very mention sent the fear of black lists into the hearts of the entertainment community.

The set is the quintessential

fifties office: vinyl furniture, battered wood desks, and rotary phones, which — unfortunately — rung offstage and ruined the illusion. The New York skyline visible from the 23rd floor had a realistic three-dimensional look, but the sky was frozen in a permanent sunrise/sunset.

The women's costumes are much more fun visually than the men's, whose clothing really hasn't changed that much in fifty years other than to go casual. Lucas' character had the trademark bow tie, and Max Prince's Semitic Santa was metaphorical for his parting generosity to his cadre of writers.

"Laughter on the 23rd Floor" has the appeal of its time period: its humor is both cutting and cerebral, and it steers clear of the earthy and everyday jokes of today's half-hour situation comedy. It's humor with a human touch and an aura of class.

## Halloween from page E1

All 60 band members will be wearing Halloween costumes. The concert, led by conductor Paul Barber, includes spine tingling and haunting music for the occasion.

### Hayride Through Valley of Death

7 p.m. Thursday-Sunday, Oct. 21-24, at Parkland Park, on Ann Arbor Trail, east of Telegraph in Dearborn Heights. Admission \$6, \$4 ages 12 and under, group rates available, call (313) 730-2090.

### Ward's Orchards Haunted Forest Rides

If your appetite calls for adventure, hop on a hay wagon Friday-Saturday through Sunday, Oct. 31. Rides depart from dusk to 11 p.m. Admission \$6 adults, \$4 under 10 years old. A "child-friendly" Haunted ride will depart 2-5 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 24, and costs \$1.50 per person. Take I-94 West to exit 163 South, and follow signs to Ward's, 6565

Merritt Road in Ypsilanti. Call (734) 482-7744 for information or www.wards.com.

### Pumpkin Hollow Haunted Forest

Ride through Haunted Forest, Fridays-Saturdays (nights), Oct. 22-23 and 28-30, also pumpkin-pick, animal petting farm and entertainment showcase, at Bunyue Farms, 7300 E. Joy Road, west of Curtis Road, Ann Arbor. Admission \$6, \$4 for children under age 10. Friendly Haunting Days Rides for very young children and families, 2-5 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 24. The cost is \$1.50 per person, call (734) 332-1971 for information.

### Reaper's Dungeon

Haunted House, Oct. 14-17 and Oct. 20-31, 7:30 p.m. Sunday-Thursday, and until 11:30 p.m. Friday-Saturday, Wal-Mart Parking Lot, Middlebelt and I-96, Livonia. The cost is \$7, \$4 children under age 12, (734) 624-0514.

### Children's Safe Halloween Party

Schoolcraft College welcomes this kid's event 3-6 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 31, at the Waterman Campus Center, 18600 Haggerty Road in Livonia. Games, prizes and magic show will keep the kiddies' attention. Advance tickets only, \$6 for one child and two adults, \$3 for additional adults. Call (734) 492-4422.

### House of Horrors

Orchard Grove Community Church will show real-life horrors like the Columbine shooting, domestic violence, drunken driving at this House of Horrors, open 6:30-11 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays in October. Located at the Old Orchard Theatre on Orchard Lake Road, north of 12 Mile Road. Admission \$7, call (248) 324-1700.

### Haunted Theatre of Doom

Stay seated during this 35-minute show of sound, lighting

and pyrotechnics, located inside Wonderland Mall in Livonia. Tickets \$13. Children under 13 not admitted. Discounts available at Harmony House. Call (734) 624-DOOM.

### Halloween for the little ones at area Metroparks

Kensington: "Animal Myths and Superstitions" — 1 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 31, at the Nature Center. Learn about bats, wolves, spiders and other Halloween creatures. Call for more information or register at (800) 477-3178 or locally (248) 695-0603. Kensington is near Brighton.

Stoney Creek: Ms. Halloween welcomes friends to celebrate with symbols, songs, games and treats at this year's "Tots-n-Halloween" — 2 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 31. Children 3-7 years old are invited and must be accompanied by an adult. Tickets \$2 per person. Call (810) 751-4621 for more information. The park is near Rochester.

as almost a continuation, even though they're different characters. It's sort of the next step after 'Heidi.' There's a thematic connection between the two and I think it's true. They're the same kinds of issues of women trying to find where they belong.

"Something that I've noticed in both of these productions, and maybe it has to do with the nature of St. Dunstan's too, but Wasserstein really forces you — whether it's as a director or as an actor with her work — to really dig deep into yourself. I think you learn a lot about yourself as a person. I saw it with 'Sisters' and I see it in this show as well. And I think it speaks to her amazing talent. If the actors are discovering those things, hopefully the audience will take away some of that as well. It's a pretty wonderful experience to have."

To complete her roster at St. Dunstan's, Smith has just begun her first term as president. "We always welcome new members," she said.

Rounding out the cast is

Marnie H. Diehm of Huntington Woods, Scott MacDonald of Waterford, Chris Steinmayer of Waterford, Jill Ross of Huntington Woods, Linda Parker Watson of West Bloomfield, Nicole Slacey of Royal Oak and Joshua S. Dawson of Madison Heights. Mark Nathanson directs the ensemble and Nancy Tveegarden Wegienok is the assistant director.

Following "The Heidi Chronicles," St. Dunstan's will present its Children's Theater production of "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" Nov. 19-21.

Kicking off 2000 is Larry Shue's comedy "The Foreigner" Jan. 21-22, and Jan. 27-29. "Foxfire" captures the essence of life in the Appalachians, a loving tribute to the power of love, family and the human spirit, March 17-19 and March 23-25.

The Greek Theatre will have a lot of heart when the crowd-pleasing musical "Damn Yankees" is performed June 2-3 and 8-10. Call (248) 644-0527 for season ticket information.

## Heidi from page E1

**SUGARLOAF'S 5TH ANNUAL novi art fair**

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**DIRECTIONS:** Located on I-96 northwest of Detroit at Exit 162. Go south on Novi Road. Turn right onto Expo Center Drive.

**During fair call (248) 380-7003**

**MAP:** Shows location of Sugarloaf Novi Art Fair at Exit 162 off I-96, near Ann Arbor and Detroit.

**HALLOWEEN COLORING CONTEST**

Open to Ages 2-13. One winner per age category - \$20 Wonderland Mall Gift Certificate.

Contest rules and regulations available at Wonderland Mall Customer Service Center. Deadline for Entries - 5pm Thursday, October 28. Entries must be dropped off at Wonderland Mall Customer Service Center in the Target Wing.

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