

THEATER

JET captures the 'Prisoner of Second Avenue'

Jewish Ensemble Theatre presents the "Prisoner of Second Avenue" through Sunday, Jan. 23 in the Aaron DeRoy Theatre, lower level of Jewish Community Center, 6600 W. Maple Road at Drake, West Bloomfield. Performances 7:30 p.m. Wednesday-Thursday and Sunday, 8 p.m. Saturday, and 2 p.m. Sunday and Wednesday. Tickets \$15-\$25, call (248) 788-2900.

BY JON KATZ
SPECIAL WRITER

Melvin Edison is a 47-year-old throw rug ready to unravel. Burned out at work and bummed out at home, he comes apart at the seams the way only a Neil Simon can orchestrate it. As a local production, "Prisoner of Second Avenue" is played out as only the Jewish Ensemble Theatre can play it.

There is a dearth of area actors who are the right age for "Prisoner" and who can speak Simon lines, possess Simon poses and look Simon looks. JET doesn't have this problem. It brings out the best local talent or it brings them in. With "Prisoner" they did both.

On a sweltering summer night in Manhattan, the heat rises from the street fourteen floors below. So does the stench of garbage. Dogs are barking, neighbors are partying, the air conditioner keeps blasting and the toilet keeps running. Such is the stuff of which New York nervous breakdowns are made. For Mel (John Siel'ert), the clock is most definitely ticking.

"(We) live like some kind of a caged animal in a Second Avenue zoo," he moans to his patient wife. When she suggests an analyst, he answers, "I'm disappointing. Edna, I don't need an analyst. I need Lost and Found." After being fired he concludes, "miracles don't happen when you're 47. When Moses saw the burning bush, he must've been 23, 24 the most."

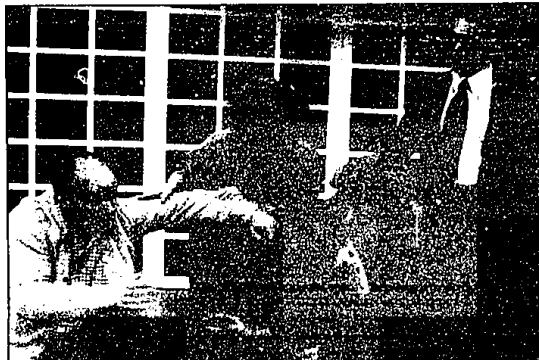
Siebert captures that East Coast kvetching rhythm wonderfully, although a bit too fast at times. Michigan native Roxanne Wellington was brought in from New York to play Edna, and brings off the role-reversal very nicely. Forced to go back to work, Edna dutifully hurries home to make Mel lunch while he grows

more paranoid about "The Plot" that only people stuck home listening to radio call-in shows know about. Watch as he cautiously unscrews the phone to check for bugs.

After the breakdown, Mel's successful older brother and three daffy sisters arrive to help out. Brother Harry suggests they pitch in X dollars for doctor bills. "Is it a big X or a little X," they first need to know.

There aren't three more perfect actresses in town for these roles than JET's Artistic Director Evelyn Orbach, Henrietta Hermelin Weinberg and Rochelle Rosenthal. They look like they've already lived through every word. However, they also give us unscripted business (cutting an apple, fussing with sofa pillows) that comes across more like onepmanship than something to do. As Harry, Fred Buchalter competently deals with the crisis of Mel's illness and the burden of having those three as sisters.

Director Mary Bremer misses the mark only twice. When the siblings come to call, Mel shows too little of the effects of the sedatives he's on (note to Edna:



On stage: John Siebert (left to right) as Mel, Rochelle Rosenthal as Pauline, Evelyn Orbach as Jessie, and Fred Buchalter as Harry in "The Prisoner of Second Avenue."

it's pronounced "VAL-ee-um," not "VAL-yoom"). In the final scene, with the breakdown behind him,

he should be a somewhat kinder and gentler Mel as a contrast to Edna's now being the breadwin-

ner. By returning him totally to his old self, the last gag loses its impact.

Learn about 'The making of a Steinway'

PRNewswire - Miles Chapin, a fifth generation descendant of Henry Englehart Steinway, founder of Steinway & Sons, will appear at local Hammell Music locations on Saturday, Jan. 15 to present "88-Keys: The Making of a Steinway."

Chapin's presentation will combine aspects of the family's history with facts about the design and manufacturing of Steinway pianos.

Two lectures have been scheduled. Chapin will speak at Hammell Music's Livonia location at 15630 Middlebelt, North of 6 Mile road at 11 a.m. The program will be repeated at Ham-

mell Music in Bloomfield Hills, 4110 Telegraph, South of Long Lake Road, at 2 p.m.

There is no admission charge, however seating for both lectures is limited. Phone reservations are being accepted by Hammell Music at (800) 742-4544.

Chapin, who resides in New York City, is an accomplished actor with many television appearances and more than eighteen motion pictures to his credit. His hardcover book, from which the lecture is drawn, was released in late 1997 and is currently in its fifth printing.

Fans of the Martha Stewart

television series may recall an episode in which Chapin appeared to discuss the process of rebuilding Stewart's 1920s Steinway player grand.

A classic American success story, the saga of the Steinways and their flagship product is sure to please music lovers, history buffs and anyone who cares about elegant engineering and design. Crafted by hand in Long Island City (NY), the Steinway stands alone at the pinnacle of the piano-makers art. Made up of over 12,000 parts, the Steinway grand piano has rightly been called "the most complicated piece of machinery made by hand in the world today."

Cranbrook Institute of Science Wants Your Face...
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On February 5 Cranbrook Institute of Science opens a new traveling exhibit, *Take My Picture, Please: A Festival of Cultural Snapshots*, and the most important part of the exhibit is YOU.

Take My Picture, Please explores our many reasons for taking pictures: preserving memories, recording important moments, creating an aid to sharing an experience and sometimes, just for the fun of it. The desire to preserve images is ancient; witness the face of a Pharaoh adorning an Egyptian tomb. But in our time, the extravagant paintings of kings and commoners. The inexpensive and efficient cameras of today have made picture taking easy, affordable and universal.

We want a photograph of you, a loved one, your pet, a special moment in your life—birthday, wedding, graduation, holiday celebration, in your home, at school, at work—for our Snapshot Gallery.

We want you to tell us why you chose this photo—and what makes it special to you.

Selected photos and descriptions will become part of the Snapshot Gallery in *Take My Picture, Please* and when you visit the exhibit you can look in on the lives of your fellow contributors, as well.

When we receive your photo, you'll be entered to win a Minox CD-70 35mm camera (child) or a Konica Z-up 140 Super 35mm camera (adult).

Please complete this form and enclose with your photo:

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THE Observer & Eccentric NEWSPAPERS 15TH ANNUAL

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