

# Entertainment

By Kelly Wagonke, Editor / 34, 923-2105 • [www.home.com.net](http://www.home.com.net)on-line with <http://observernewscenter.com>INSIDE:  
8 Days a Week

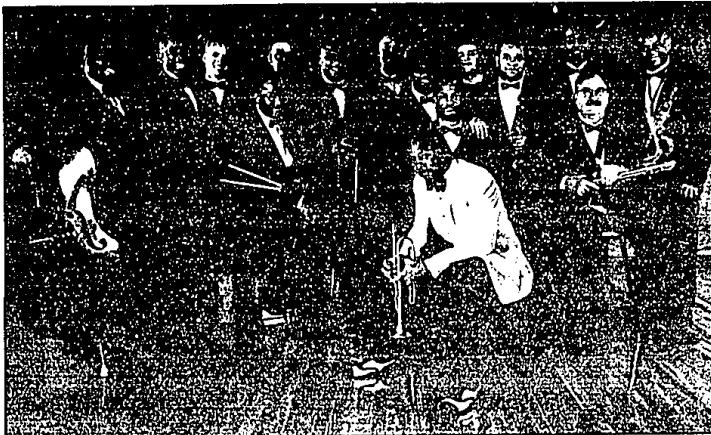
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Thursday, April 20, 2000

## THE WEEKEND

### FRIDAY

Stanley Tucci stars in and directs Joe Gould's "Secret, the true story of a 'New Yorker' writer and the eccentric bohemian he turns into as a minor celebrity in the 1940s, opening today at metro Detroit movie theaters.



For dancers only: Wynton Marsalis and the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra swing the night away on their *For Dancers Only* tour.

## Jazz Orchestra swings the night away

By LINDA ANN CHOMIN  
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It's 10 a.m. California time and Rodney Whitaker is awakening to a view of the ocean outside his room at a West Coast hotel. Santa Cruz is the second stop on the 23-city tour the native Detroit is playing with trumpeter Wynton Marsalis and the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra.

Sound grueling? Not for Whitaker who loves swinging the nights away. Together with Marsalis and the orchestra, Whitaker spends eight months a year on the road introducing audiences to jazz and swing dancing. Their *For Dancers Only* tour, named after Sy Oliver's 1937 chart for the Jimmie Lunceford Orchestra, is reawakening people to the fun of dancing to swing music.

On Saturday, April 22, the orchestra will stop at Eastern Michigan University as part of its tour. The tour will continue on to concert and dance halls including the Roseland Ballroom in New York where the performance will be broadcast by the BBC. A free lesson with national swing dance champions Janice Wilson and Paola Lanna precedes the April 22 dance concert presented by the University Musical Society. It is one of jazz at Lincoln Center's educational efforts. It is being presented at EMU because the venue allows room for dancing.

"I love it," said Whitaker who plays bass with the orchestra. "Anything swing is good to me. We're trying to expose people to jazz. The best way is to have them come out and have fun dancing. When I was a kid in Detroit,

I played with J.C. Heard and did a lot of dances. Growing up I thought it was a drag but now I enjoy it. It's enjoyable to see someone inspired to dance to your music."

At age 32, Whitaker is too young to remember the era when dancers stopped moving to the sounds of Duke Ellington, Count Basie and Benny Goodman. Nonetheless, he's glad to see people back on their feet dancing to the timeless works of the legendary Big Band leaders along with new tunes by Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra trombonist Wyycliffe Gordon and others.

"People have the tendency to think bebop brought about the end of swing dance," said Whitaker. "What a lot of people don't realize is that it was rock 'n' roll. People stopped dancing to jazz and started dancing to rock 'n' roll."

Whitaker thinks the rebirth of swing and jazz is a good thing. A professional jazz musician since age 17, Whitaker

has performed with everyone from Branford Marsalis, Joe Henderson, Joshua Redman, Stanley Turrentine, and Kenny Garrett to Marcus Belgrave and Alma Smith. He joined the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra in August of 1998 at the request of artistic director Wynton Marsalis.

Whitaker had run into Marsalis in New York shortly after his *Children of the Light* album came out. He had recorded with Marsalis a few years before. Now Whitaker was asking the legendary jazz trumpeter to play on his next album *Hidden Kingdom*.

Whitaker has appeared on more than 70 recordings. *Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, his fourth album as a leader, will be released in May. The

title is taken from a poem by Khalil Gibran.

"Sometimes we try to possess life instead of living life," said Whitaker. "You have to embrace life and live it while you can. This is my coming of age album."

Bass wasn't Whitaker's first love. He began playing violin in fourth grade and "fell in love with it" but eventually switched to bass at the suggestion of his teacher Hosen Taylor at Remus-Robinson Junior High in Detroit. The only child in a family of eight to become a musician, Whitaker is now passing on his love of music not only to his five children but to others as well.

Whitaker was in town in February to perform with the Lincoln Center Jazz Sextet which served a week-long residency in conjunction with the University Musical Society in Ann Arbor. Whitaker gave several master classes in Detroit-area schools and narrated a program broadcast by Wayne RESA to students in Wayne, Oakland and several other counties around the state of Michigan.

Whitaker believes educating young people about jazz is one of the most important things he can do. Since September, he's been coaching students in the Detroit Symphony Civic Orchestra's jazz band. Whitaker played with the civic orchestra from age 16.

"That organization has a lot to do with me being a professional musician," said Whitaker, a jazz studies professor at Michigan State University since 1995. Whitaker formerly taught at the University of Michigan. "They paid for my lessons through high school so I'm just giving back. It's great to be able to inspire these kids and it's inspiring to see someone inspired by your words. And I'm learning a lot about teaching and patience."

## Gilda's Club honors memory of comedian

By KELLY WYONKE  
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Just thinking about comedian Alyce Faye makes me smile. She was kind-hearted, funny and generous with her time and talent. Most of her phone calls to the *Observer & Eccentric Newspapers* were to ask if we could do something to help someone in need, not to promote her latest gig at a local club.

Diagnosed with lung cancer in August 1999, Faye kept making people smile until she died in November.

On Wednesday, May 3, Gilda's Club of Metro Detroit is honoring her memory by presenting the "It's Always Someone Special" award to her husband Fred Sewell at *Gilda's Big Night Out II*. The award is presented to the person who has demonstrated a strong commitment to Gilda's Club Metro Detroit.

Faye, a resident of Farmington, was one of the early supporters of Gilda's Club Metro Detroit, which opened on Jan. 28, 1998. She founded Motor City Women of Comedy with

comedian Mary Miller in 1994 and hosted an annual fund-raiser for Gilda's Club of Metro Detroit. The last one was held in 1997.

Named in honor of comedian Gilda Radner, a native Detroit who died from ovarian cancer in 1989, the club offers men, women and children and their families and friends opportunities to share experiences, develop strategies for living with cancer and make new friends. The 6,000-square-foot clubhouse in Royal Oak offers a home-like atmosphere where members can participate in support and networking groups, workshops, lectures and social events.

"Alyce came to us out of the blue," said Geri Lester of Franklin, treasurer of the board of directors for Gilda's Club Metro Detroit, and one of the club's founders. "She begged and borrowed from friends, and worked hard to put on a successful event to benefit Gilda's Club. She had all of her comedian friends donate their time; none of them charged a penny. They all gave of their time and talent, it was really something. She was a very wonderful person who had no trouble motivating others."

Miller, who lived in Farmington Hills, West Bloomfield Township and Berkley before moving to Ohio, met Faye at Mark Ridley's Comedy Castle in Royal Oak.

"Gilda Radner was an inspiration to women," said Miller. "I heard about Gilda's Club and thought wouldn't it be cool if all got together to make Gilda's dream come true. I immediately called my

Please see **GILDA**, E2

### Gilda's Big Night Out II

What: A night of comedy, food and fun to benefit Gilda's Club Metro Detroit.

When: 6 p.m. silent auction and strolling suppers, 8 p.m. performance by comedian Jeffrey Ross, Wednesday, May 3.

Where: Temple Beth El, 7400 Telegraph Road, Bloomfield Hills.

Tickets: \$125 donor, \$200 patron, call (248) 577-0800, Ext. 22.

## DANCE

### Dancers are ready to 'Burn the Floor' at the Fox

What: Detroit debut of *Burn The Floor*, dance fave featuring 44 of the world's top ballroom dancers and such dances as the tango, cha cha and lindy hop.

Where: Fox Theatre, 2211 Woodward Ave., Detroit.

Tickets: \$10-60 at Fox Theatre box office, (313) 933-6521, or through Tickmaster, (248) 433-1515

By NICOLE STAFFORD  
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Ballroom dancing looks like a rising phenomenon — a rage that lit up movie screens and dance halls in the 1940s only to burn out and resurface as an exercise in nostalgia at the turn of the century.

But local instructors and aficionados of ballroom dancing prefer to use the term "rediscovery" to describe the form's recent rise in popularity, a movement fueled by younger generations' attraction to swing and salsa on the night club circuit and a steady stream of Latin-inspired music in popular culture.

The fire now engulfs the stage in *Burn The Floor*, a sensuous, no-holds-barred ballroom dance rut that runs April 26-30 at the Fox Theatre in Detroit.

"For those of us who are hooked on it, it

never dies," said 71-year-old Norn Nader, a local ballroom instructor who fondly recalls when "touch dancing" flourished in the Detroit area. "What's happened is through television and movies there's been a revival," said Nader, an instructor at Schoolcraft College in Livonia.

Others have simply discovered ballroom's many benefits — healthy social recreation, sources for entertainment and a good form of physical and mental exercise, said Glenn Clark, a professional ballroom dancer and co-owner of Stardust Ballroom dance studio in Southfield.

"You can go the gym and work out, but you can't go to a night club in a short shirt and show off your abs unless you're there to dance," Clark joked.

People also have tired of being specta-

Please see **BURN**, E2



White hot: More than 40 of the world's best ballroom dancers strut their stuff in *Burn The Floor*, an electrifying and fast-paced showcase of standard and Latin dance styles.