

Thursday, February 15, 2001

FRIDAY



Wild Swan Theater presents "Along the Tracks," an original production for young people based on incidents related to the Underground Railroad, 10 a.m., 12:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. at the Towsley Theater on the Washtenaw Community College campus in Ann Arbor. Tickets \$6 children, \$8 adults, (734) 763-8587.

SATURDAY



Detroit Symphony Orchestra Principal Trombonist, Kenneth Thompkins, is one of the featured artists in "Classical Roots," a concert celebrating African American classical music composers and musicians, narrated by Danny Glover, 8:30 p.m. at Orchestra Hall in Detroit. Tickets \$20-\$52, (313) 576-5111.

SUNDAY



Heather Yanke (clockwise), Caitlin Burke of Farmington Hills, Won Kyung Shin, and Jaquelyn Wagner, winners of the Pontiac-Oakland Symphony's annual Concerto Competition, will perform with the symphony at 3 p.m. in Oakland University's Varner Recital Hall in Rochester Hills. Tickets \$15 adults, \$10 students and seniors, (248) 334-6024.



Aaron Douglas' "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" is one of the many inspirational pieces featured in the Walter O. Evans Collection on display during "Celebrate Black History! The Harlem Renaissance Continues" Wednesday-Sunday throughout the month of February at Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn. Admission \$7.00-\$12.50. No charge for children under 5 and seniors 65 and over. (313) 977-1100.

Good sport: Toby Booker clowns around as Luther Billis, the smart aleck sailor charming his way through South Pacific.

'South Pacific' makes light of serious subject



STAFF PHOTOS BY PAUL HURCHMAN

UGLINESS TAINTS BEAUTIFUL SETTING

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
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As the house lights go down, and musicians in the orchestra pit begin warming up, the energy level rises as actors finish buttoning the wildly-flowered shirts and regulation Marine uniforms they'll be wearing in *South Pacific*.

Minutes earlier backstage, the Plymouth Theatre Guild cast, led by Toby Booker, was rehearsing the play on the campus of Northville Psychiatric Hospital. Tickets: \$12, \$5 ages 18 and under, call (248) 349-7110.

"It's exciting. We have a great cast and we're having a great time," said Kathy Booker, a Walled Lake resident making her directing debut. Booker was assistant director for *Death Trap* presented by SRO Productions in Southfield. "The set gives the feeling of the island, but we're using actors to imply Bali Ha'i where it takes place. I enjoy the whole romantic mood of the show. It's light except when Lt. Cable dies. It's real life. Actors are lending their own personalities to the characters."

That includes the smart aleck Luther Billis, played by Booker's son Toby who kids his favorite part of the musical is when the good-natured sailor is on stage.

"My character is the comedic relief in the show," said Toby, who played one of the leading characters in Neil Simon's *Poet* with the Farmington Players last fall.

"My main objective is to get over to Bali Ha'i because all of the French planters have all their young women there. There's a lot of back door

humor but overall the musical is pretty heavy with racial overtones. There's two love stories tinged with racism. If you consider when the play was written racism was such a big part of the country. They were ahead of their time."

Lengthy

A lengthy show — 128 pages without music — *South Pacific* confronts the ugliness encountered when people of different races dislike one another because of the color of their skin or the slant of their eyes. The show's content was one of the elements that attracted Anthony Provenzola when he was surfing the Web to find a community theater

holding auditions. Provenzola, a Farmington Hills resident, hadn't acted since his student days at Redford Union High School and Wayne State University where he studied voice and musical theater. Provenzola plays Lt. Cable, a Marine who falls in love with a native girl but his prejudice doesn't allow him to commit to her.

"The music back then was popular music of that time; people knew all the songs," said Provenzola of Farmington Hills. "It was groundbreaking because it touched on issues not talked about at the time."

Ruled by prejudices

Susan Merenda plays one of the lead characters ruled by her prejudices. Nellie Forbush is the ensign who falls in love with Emile deBeque. Her bigotry is unmasked

Please see PACIFIC, B2



Tropical breeze: Kerry Plague (left), Susan Merenda and Anthony Provenzola rehearse the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical for opening night.

Genesis Troupe presents 'Our Town'

BY KEELY WYGONIK
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Life's simple truths haven't changed — you're born, you live, you die. It all goes by so fast. We don't pay attention to life until we lose someone we love.

Set in Grover's Corners, N.H., 1901, Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* could be your town. The truths about everyday life revealed in this Pulitzer Prize-winning play are the reason The Genesis Troupe chose to present it.

The audience meets Emily Webb and her neighbor, George Gibbs, their parents, and some of the other people who live in the town. Emily and George grow up together, fall in love and get married.

"It's a beautiful story. It's just about life, whether it's 2001 or 1901," said assistant director Delores Pearson of



Dress rehearsal: Lane Ritter (left) and Carl Polys rehearse a scene from "Our Town."

Canton.

Lane Ritter sets the scene as stage manager of this timeless story opening Friday at St. Kenneth Catholic Church in Plymouth.

"It's about a small town in New Hampshire," he said. "Act 1 sets the tone, it's about daily life in the town. Act 2 is love and marriage, and Act 3 centers around a number of people who have died. The play shows what small town life was like — the good and sad — in a church-going community, it stresses the value of family."

Background

Founded this summer by Pearson, Marlene Landry of Livonia, and a group of interested friends, The Genesis Troupe is on a mission to present family-oriented shows to the community. They also donate a portion of pro-

What: The Genesis Troupe presents, "Our Town" by Thornton Wilder. When: 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, Feb. 16-17, Feb. 23-24; 8 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 18 and Feb. 24. Where: St. Kenneth's Catholic Church, 14951 Haggerty Road (between Five Mile Road and Schoolcraft), Plymouth. Tickets: \$5 at the door, or call (734) 981-3163 or e-mail genesis@genesis.com.

Please see GENESIS, B2

MUSIC

Conductor leads powerful interpretation of Verdi's 'Requiem'



PHOTO BY LINDA KOLLEZ

Master work: Manfred Honeck conducts the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra.

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
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Manfred Honeck is serious about his music. He doesn't hurry as he explains his approach to conducting.

Honeck arrived in New York a week ago from Dublin where he and the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra began their tour. After stops at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., and the University of Notre Dame in Indiana, the 100-member ensemble will perform in Ann Arbor on Friday. On the program is the massive master work — Verdi's *Requiem*. Honeck will embrace it with his heart as well as his mind.

"I first look at the technical to know what happens in the score, the harmony, then I look to find what is behind the piece, what the composer intended and what we understand in our time, how can I describe with my orchestra the feeling," said the Austrian-born Honeck. "What does the *Requiem* mean in our time? It's what humans are asking for in our technical world. People are longing for more humanity besides this machine. They're longing for things behind us."

Audiences will always cherish this master work which the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra will perform with the Swedish Radio Choir and soloists Marina Mescheriakova, soprano; Nadja Michael,

University Musical Society series

■ Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra and Choir perform Verdi's *Requiem* — 8 p.m. Friday, Feb. 16 at Hill Auditorium, 825 North University, Ann Arbor. Tickets \$14-\$46, call (734) 764-2538. ■ Swedish Radio Choir and Eric Ericson Chamber Choir unite for a concert — 8 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 17 at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, 2250 East Stadium, Ann Arbor. Tickets: \$25, call (734) 764-2538.

mezzo-soprano; Marco Berti, tenor, and John Relyea, bass-baritone.

Familiar

Verdi's *Requiem* was first presented in 1874. Honeck knows the work well. He first performed it as a member of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. In fact the last time Honeck was in Michigan was when the orchestra, under the direction of Leonard Bernstein, performed here in the late 1980s.

"Verdi composed his *Requiem* a little bit from his own death," said Honeck of the work the orchestra played two weeks ago in Stockholm. "There isn't one person who hasn't thought about his own death. I combine my own thinking about death, Verdi's thinking about death, was he religious? If you go very deep into the work, the context, people feel the message."

"It's one of my favorites. Every time when you do it it's impressive in a total great way. The way the man expressed it. We know he studied Mozart's *Requiem*."

Manfred did his own research on the meaning of the words before conducting the work.

"I asked the Vatican to find the text so I could go deeper into words, if I could see the words to understand more and more how he composed the meaning," said the 42-year-old Honeck who took over as conductor of the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra.

Please see HONECK, B2