

Sunday, April 15, 2001

ARTISTIC EXPRESSIONS



LINDA ANN CHOMIN

Latin duo, LSO get ready to move audiences

Abha Dearing sounded like she was still on top of the world Tuesday afternoon. Four days earlier she won the 2001 Detroit Music Award for outstanding classical vocalist at the State Theatre.

"It was such a surprise," said Dearing who directs the choir and orchestra at Mercy High School in Farmington Hills. "My teacher Frances Brockington was in my category so that made it even more of an honor."

But the thrill didn't stop there. Dearing began the evening by performing at the awards ceremony with her husband Steven Dearing.

"A lot of people had never heard us or seen us before

so it was a wonderful opportunity to get our sound across," said Dearing, a former Plymouth resident now living in Ferndale.

Fortunately for those who couldn't make the awards, Abha and Steven will perform music from their CD, currently in the works at Joe LoDuc's studio in West Bloomfield, at Birmingham Temple on Saturday, April 21, at Church Hill High School, 8900 Newburgh, (north of Joy Road), Livonia. Tickets \$15, \$10, \$5. Call (248) 646-6666. For information, call (734) 425-4655.

Duo return to Farmington Hills for the next to the last concert on the Vivace series.



Two to tango: Abha and Steven Dearing will perform tango music by Astor Piazzolla in concert at Birmingham Temple in Farmington Hills.

Latin music

If you love Latin music you won't want to miss the Dearing's rendition of "The History of Tango" by Astor Piazzolla, "Suite Buenos Aires" by Maximo Diego Pujol, and Brazilian folk music by Celso Machado.

"Spanish music and Latin fever are so big now with Ricky Martin and Jennifer Lopez and there's so much good music for flute and guitar, and voice and guitar," said Dearing, who when she isn't singing is playing the flute. "The music helps to bond cultures. The roots are in African, Cuban and South American music. You just have to move to it."

It's no wonder that Steven loves the music as much as Abha. After all, it's what brought them together. They celebrated not only their third wedding anniversary on April 11 but also their joining together as a musical duo.

"People are really responding to Latin music," said Steven, a guitarist nominated in the outstanding classical instrumentalist category. Abha and Steven, who teaches guitar at the

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WHODUNNIT?

AMATEUR SLEUTHS ATTEMPT TO SOLVE 1916 TRAIN ROBBERY

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
STAFF WRITER
lchomin@oe.homecomm.net

John Bower leans across the table as if he's about to divulge a secret. "So who do you think did it?"

For the last hour, the Ypsilanti playwright left a trail of clues for solving one of the major crimes in the early part of the 20th century. Bower thinks he knows who, or at least the reason why, two men boarded a train in Ypsilanti in 1916 to steal two bags of mail. He'd like others to guess their identity and maybe even help close the case of the Great Ypsilanti Train Robbery.

Bower and Sara Grivas, a Livonia resident, are inviting amateur sleuths who will help unravel the mystery when their cast of five looks for answers during an interactive dinner theater Friday, May 4, at the Angel Food Cafe in Ypsilanti. Set in the Victorian decor of the cafe, "The Great Ypsilanti Train Robbery of 1916: An Evening of Historical License" turns back the clock to a simpler time when most of the towns surrounding Detroit were rural, and automobiles came in one color—black.

All of the characters in Bower's play are real and lived in Ypsilanti at the time of the crime.

Digging up details

"I want to the library and the Ypsilanti Historical Society to dig up information on the robbery of 1916 in Depot Town because I wanted to work with local material," said Bower. "It amazes me that it happened in Ypsilanti. The train passed through our communities and these men escaped. Add to that the fact it was only 85 years ago. This is timeless. We wrestle with issues such as relationships between men and women and personalities."

Grivas takes on the role of one of the town's more famous citizens, and what a character she is. According to



On the trail: John Bower plays Edward Batway, the tough Ypsilanti cop looking for the train robbers.

the Sept. 29, 1916, Daily Ypsilanti-Press, Mrs. D. Z. Curtiss single-handedly chased down two car thieves, "climbed onto the running board and shut off the engine at the same time covering the driver with a revolver." She then ordered him and his partner in crime into the back seat until officers arrived.

"When we did the play in March

one lady told me she knew my character's husband," said Grivas. "That sent shivers up my spine to think there could still be clues or people out there who know something."

Crime clues

Augustus Beyer had left \$50,000 to build Beyer Hospital in Ypsilanti.

Could the check have been in the mail? Is that what the robbers were after?

"I couldn't have made up characters this good or the story," said Bower who began uncovering names connected to the robbery only four months ago. "The newspaper said there were two dark-clad figures who entered the train as it was bound from New York to Chicago, took the engineer as hostage, threatened to blow everybody up with nitroglycerin and then fled with two bags of mail. There was a \$4,000 reward but they were never caught."

Bower plays Edward Batway, one of two cops trying to find the robbers. Bower frequently takes on the role of the good guy when putting on mini-dramas during services at St. Luke Lutheran Church in Ann Arbor. That's where he and three of the cast members originally met. Bower began writing and producing theater for church camps at age 8. He has a degree in language/literature from Judson College in Illinois.

"The Detroit cop (played by Tim Gerken) thinks my character is a hick," said Bower. "I tried to look back and see what was going on to develop

What: Cherubim Players present "The Great Ypsilanti Train Robbery of 1916: An Evening of Historical License," an interactive comedic dinner theater. When: 5:15 p.m. and 8:15 p.m. Friday, May 4. Where: Angel Food Cafe, 6 West Michigan Ave., Ypsilanti. Tickets: \$44.50, \$38 per couple, includes choice of three entrees: Prime Rib au Jus, Basil Crusted White Fish or Grilled Chicken with Bourbon and Shrimp, Advance ticket purchase and meal selection required, call (734) 463-0135.

the characters. Women didn't have the vote. One of the characters, the refined Miss Priddy (Janelle Reahm), is a suffragette, and a professor at Normal College. She eventually became dean of women at the college that's now Eastern Michigan University. We also have the town embalmer and the man who owned the local underwear factory.

"The robbers left the train a mile from the Fair Lane Estate and Henry Ford (Joseph Klei) was one of the first on-site the next morning so I made him one of the characters."

Amateur sleuths

The rest of the more than 60 "characters" will be played by the audience who along with their tickets will receive subpoenas letting them know they're suspects. Upon arriving at the cafe, each will be given a description of their character.

"The main character's table is in the middle of restaurant; it's a town meeting investigation," said Bower. "I'm amazed at the way people go along. People want to participate. They want to have fun somewhere where the language doesn't get out of control. The night is for fun."

"We encourage people to dress in period costume," added Grivas who had no previous acting experience until joining the drama team at St. Luke Lutheran Church. "In March

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Prim and proper: Miss Priddy (played by Janelle Reahm) is a suffragette and professor at Normal College which is now known as Eastern Michigan University.

CONCERT

UMS Choral Union brings surround sound to Hill Auditorium

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
STAFF WRITER
lchomin@oe.homecomm.net

Thomas Sheets and the University Musical Society Choral Union have sung requiems by Verdi, Mozart and Brahms but none quite compare to the trumpet sounding from all directions in "Messe des Morts" by Berlioz.

The French composer wrote the requiem as a memorial to fallen French soldiers upon receiving the commission from the Minister of Interior. In its debut in 1837, more than 400 singers and musicians assembled to trumpet the arrival of judgment day. The performance was declared a success much to the delight of Berlioz who had wanted to produce a large-scale sacred work for some time.

Musical collaboration

Not to be outdone, although notably on a somewhat smaller scale, Sheets as conductor of the UMS Choral Union, is bringing together 135 singers, the Greater Lansing Symphony Orchestra, 28 musicians from the University of Michigan Symphony Band, and tenor

Stanford Olsen, who regularly sings with the Metropolitan Opera, for a Sunday, April 22, performance at Hill Auditorium in Ann Arbor.

"This requiem is in a class of its own, the most colossal choral orchestral work in the international repertoire today," said Sheets who also conducts the Masterworks Choral at Oakland Community College in Farmington Hills. "On stage is the principal orchestra, more than 70 members of the Greater Lansing Symphony Orchestra, tenor soloist Stanford Olsen, and 16 timpani. Another 28 players in four small brass orchestras surround the audience. Two are in the second balcony, two at the far end of the stage extension."

"Berlioz read the words in the text about the wondrous trumpet sound

sound throughout the land calling all to be judged and understood this to mean no one would be outside the call to judgment. He wanted the audience to experience that. When it debuted every single person was engulfed by the sound. It's an incredible effect no matter where you're sitting."

Undoubtedly, the "Requiem," with all its drama, was Berlioz's favorite composition. He wrote to a friend, "If I were threatened with the destruction of the whole of my works save one, I should crave mercy for 'Messe des Morts.'"

"As Berlioz conceived it, it was quite influential to other composers," said Sheets. "Verdi wrote a diluted version with only two offstage trumpet. For me, the challenge will be to keep everybody together with the musical forces flung all over the room. It's a financial and logistical challenge and usually performed only once a generation in major metropolitan areas. It's 28 years since it was done in Ann Arbor. The preparation has been very exciting, a labor of love."

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Surround sound: Thomas Sheets will conduct one of the masterworks of choral literature, the Berlioz "Requiem."