

THE WEEKEND



Spend a night with the Detroit Symphony Pops "Singin' in the Rain," and enjoy music from all your favorite MGM musicals, 8:30 p.m. at Orchestra Hall in Detroit. Tickets \$15-\$49, call (313) 576-5111.

SATURDAY



Robin Lewis-Bez of Livonia stars in Jeff Daniels' slapstick comedy, "The Tropical Pickle," 3 p.m. and 8 p.m. at the Gaiety Theatre in Detroit. Tickets \$31.50 (matinee), \$36.50 (evening), call (313) 963-9800.

SUNDAY

This whimsical watercolor by Julie Kachnowski of Livonia is one of the works on display at Livonia Art in the Village, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Greenmead Historical Park, 20501 Newburgh, south of Eight Mile Road, call (734) 466-2536 for information. The event features works by 170 artists and craftsmen.



Enjoy a weekend of spiritual and inspirational music at The Farmer Jack Praise Fest, noon to 11 p.m. Friday, June 8, 2-11 p.m. Saturday, June 9, and 2-10 p.m. Sunday, June 10, at Detroit's Hart Plaza. More than 30 singers, dancers and rappers including Kirk Franklin, will be performing. For schedule updates, call (734) 459-8167.

OLIVER



Street urchins warm hearts of audiences

Headed for trouble: Jody Florkowski (left to right, back row), Joseph Garreffa, Margaret Winowiecki, Sarah Wiercioch (left front row), Leif Asgerisson) Halston and Jerry Reid star in "Oliver."

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
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Leif Asgerisson doesn't mind growing his bright red hair a little long for the lead role in *Oliver*. Looking scruffy is never difficult for the 10-year-old West Bloomfield boy especially if it means advancing his career on stage. Already he's two for two, auditioning twice and winning two roles, the most recent for *Oliver*. The heartwarming musical, presented by TinderBox Productions and directed by Nancy Florkowski of Redford, opens Saturday, June 9 at the Masonic Temple in Detroit.

Even though *Oliver* was only the second play Asgerisson auditioned for — that didn't stop him from taking a stage name. He leans over and in a serious tone asks to be called Leif Halston.

Talented family

Talent runs in the family and he's taking advantage of it. Mother Pauline Martin is founder of the St. Clair Trio which recently released its new CD *Old Acquaintances* on Koch International. As a pianist, Martin concertizes across the U.S. and Canada. Older brother Erik, 14, competes with the Detroit Symphony Civic Orchestra, recently placed first in the Birmingham-Bloomfield Symphony Orchestra Junior Concerto Competition.

"I've seen my mom play and consider her a master musician," said Asgerisson who will soon begin rehearsals for the role of Young Ramon in *Madame X*. The July performances, for which he'll be paid, will be at the Mendelssohn Theatre in Ann Arbor. "She's a good teacher. I took piano lessons from her and she helps with stage presence. I also get tips on being on stage from Erik."

Asgerisson's acting and modeling studies at John Robert Powers in Southfield, and two years of tap at Central's School of Dance in Keego Harbor, helped prepare him for the role of Oliver, an orphan boy on the road to a life of crime.

"I played the Mad Hatter in *Alice in Oz* in third grade and had to do imitations of John Wayne and Johnny Carson so the British accent for Oliver wasn't difficult," said Asgerisson.

Although this is his first production outside of Roosevelt Elementary School in Keego Harbor, Asgerisson is taking it all in stride.

"I think I was a little nervous but wasn't as nervous as my first audition," he said. "I wouldn't say it's all hard work because acting is fun. What I like about this company is you know everybody. And you learn how you should move on stage."

Ruth Sable is enjoying her role as Mrs. Sowerberry, the undertaker's wife, as much as Asgerisson is *Oliver*. A 16-

year-old freshman at Thurston High School in Redford, Sable is tackling her first major role as well.

"It's really fun," said Sable, who's in her seventh play since sixth grade. "I'm making a big deal out of it so everybody has to come. Mrs. Sowerberry's mean and nasty and doesn't care for kids, the exact opposite of me. I like interacting with the little kids the best. They're so cute."

Acting is only one of Sable's hobbies. During winter, she takes a break from playing basketball and junior varsity soccer as well as writing plays and young adult novels. Sable eventually wants to become an author.

"Acting helps a lot with writing," said Sable. "If I act out a situation, I can then go back and work it out in my mind and change it before writing it."

Unfortunately, writing doesn't help Sable with acting.

"The biggest challenge is being mean because I'm not that mean in person," said Sable. "And even though the accent isn't difficult, one of my main problems is dancing."

Acting older

Sarah Wiercioch's biggest challenge is playing a character almost twice as old as her 13 years. The Plymouth girl takes on the role of Nancy, a 23-year-old. That's quite a jump from playing one of the Lullaby Girls in *TinderBox Productions' Wizard of Oz* a couple of months ago.

"The challenge is to be older," said Wiercioch who isn't "that worried" about the role. She began acting at age 6 with the Whistle Stop Players at the Plymouth Community Arts Council.

Wiercioch, who recently won a scholarship from the Plymouth Community Chorus to study voice with Linda Venable-Boeck, continues to gain performing experience. She and *Oliver* cast mate Jerry Reid will sing together at the Liberty Fest noon Sunday, June 24 at Heritage Park in Canton.

The two are "good friends" intent on perfecting their talent. Reid, a 14-year-old Canton resident, is as busy as Wiercioch trying to resolve his difficulties in portraying the Artful Dodger. Reid's last big part was in *The Sound of Music* with the Park Players at Plymouth Canton High School.

Reid, who returns to Interlochen arts camp in July to study theater for a second year, is currently a finalist in Ed McMahon's Next Big Star singing competition at www.nextbigstar.com. Once the votes are counted he could be headed for Orlando for the quarter finals at the end of June.

"It's difficult trying to play younger," said Reid who began acting at age 8 with Family Theatres and currently takes voice lessons at Talent Live in Canton. "I try to bring my inner child out of me."

Comedian looks at life with humor

BY KEELY KALESKI-WYGONIK
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It's easy to yuck it up with Bill Thomas even when you're talking about something deathly serious like funerals.

"We're going to more funerals than weddings, it seems like life goes too quickly," he says as we talk about *How Come For What: The Life Questions* his one-man comedic show at Trinity House Theatre in Livonia on Friday.

"I'm trying to come to grips with why things happen," he explains. "In the show I expound on things my wife and I realize about our lives — our family and friends — the people we work with. She gives me a perspective."

Serious issues

Ten minutes goes by as we talk about some heavy issues — death, materialism, time, family.

"Time is the only real commodity/currency we have," he tells me. "Money comes and goes."

Wait a minute, this show is supposed to deal humorously with life from birth



Bill Thomas

to death, touching on school and work, family, friendship, faith and much more.

"What's the deal, Bill? I know it's all perspective, how you play your hand, but give me something for my readers," I whine into the phone.

"OK," he says. "How about going to Catholic School and the experience. There are two kinds of people — Catholics and Publics."

I can relate to that — I was a Catholic School dropout.

Then he talks about family, and being one of nine children. "If you want to say something at the table you have to yell it out," he says. "Have you ever been with your family, looked around the room and thought to yourself, if I wasn't related to these people I wouldn't have anything to do with them?"

How Come For What: The Life Questions
What: One-man show featuring comedian Bill Thomas
When: 8 p.m. Friday, June 8
Where: Trinity House Theatre, 38840 W. Six Mile Road, (between Haggerty and I-275), Livonia
Tickets: \$12, \$10, for theater members, call (734) 484-6302

Please See THOMAS, B2

Livonia-Redford Theatre Guild showcases original short plays

BY KEELY KALESKI-WYGONIK
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Everybody's got an angle — a reason for doing what they do. Producing an annual festival of original one-act plays is a win-win for the Theatre Guild of Livonia-Redford.

One Act Stravaganza
What: Festival of four original one-act plays written by local authors presented by The Theatre Guild of Livonia-Redford
When: 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, 2 p.m. Sunday, June 15-17 and June 22-24
Where: at the playhouse, 12138 Steech Day (one block south of Five Mile Road, across from Township Hall, Redford)
Tickets: \$10 adults, \$8 seniors/students, call (313) 531-0554

Audiences get to experience a mind-altering night of theater, and the Guild gets the chance to attract new members.

"It's an excellent way of bringing in new talent, and a way of testing people out and recruiting them for larger productions," said Matt Ripper. "There's a lot of talent out there."

The Guild's One Act-Stravaganza, which opens Friday, June 15, and runs weekends through Sunday, June 24, will feature four original plays written by local authors.

Glass Slipper: Size 8 1/2 by Jacquelyn Floyd is a romantic fantasy about a girl and her old boyfriend. She's trying to forget him, but he's still in her head.

So Close, written by Ripper, a Guild member, is a play about a storyteller, reason and humor set against the tale of Icarus.

"It's a psychological journey into the way we speak and the way tales are created by reason and humor," said Ripper. "Reason can't exist without being funny because he's trying to make everything rational. Humor is always crashing in, and you need a rational mind to know where the joke is going."

Michaela Dionne of Livonia is directing *So Close*. She chose it because she thought it would be a challenge.

"It's a romp through mythic arguments between reason, humor and the

storyteller," said Dionne. "It will give the actors a chance to play many different characters in one short act. It promises to be a mental, gymnastic theater-going event."

Revelation by David MacGregor of Livonia is a "kind of funny" play about a husband and wife. The husband is the Anti-Christ and doesn't know how to act.

"It's a comedy, but also a little thought-provoking, but not much," said MacGregor. "The husband finds out why he and his wife are getting ready to go to a dinner party. The wife is shocked and sympathetic, but then turns her attention to the dinner party and what desert to bring. They're just a well intentioned, middle class couple, trying to figure it out."

Glen, Gary, Glen Bored by Tim Jeffrey of Redford, introduces audiences to a really sleazy coffin salesman, and



Rehearsing: John Hicks (left to right), Michaela Dionne, and Craig Broombaugh rehearse a scene from "So Close."

his mark who is shopping for a coffin for his father.

Jeffrey describes his play as a dark comedy — rapid fire nonsense on the order of the Marx Brothers colliding with *Saturday Night Live*. The guy looks at funerals as a kind of entertainment event.

He was inspired by a news clip about a guy scamming elderly people in convalescent homes.

"It was so gruesome that it was laughable," Jeffrey said. "I went into the back room and wrote the play."

His work has been featured at the Purple Rose Theatre.