Newly appointed artistic director too busy to play

SIMI WRIER

Debra Wicks isn't changing her act now that she's been appointed artistic director of Meadow Brook Theatre. After all ahe's already demonstrated the sidile necessary to and the theater through three steerant left the position vacant in 1999. Wicks has plenty of ideas for what shed like to accomplish in the future, but for now she's just happy to oversee the 2002-2003 season which promises to happy to oversee the 2002-2003 season which promises to happy to oversee the 2002-2003 season which promises to happy to oversee the 2002-2003 season which promises to happy to oversee the 2002-2003 season which promises so an exciting one. It will feature a new family series – and a nouth-long residency by the removned Shaw Festival. There's not a bot of changes, said Wicks who learned the basies of running Mendow Brook Theatre while serving a sesceinte director and associate aristic director from 1997-1999, and interim artistic director as mee May 1999. She officially took over the position in late May. The new season is already set. The major change is now I cau say no, and look at project fornext year.

Rut Wicks and the management attiff at Meadow Brook plant to do a "little" audience by billing first. Like many of the

plan to do a "little" audience ? building first. Like many of the

MGD

16-Nov. 10
Candida Jan. 8-Feb. 2
The Foreigner Feb. 12-March 9
Wall Until Dark March 19-April 13
Meshuggah-Nuns April 23-May

18
Holiday Tradition
A Christmas Carol Hov. 29-Dec.
22 Family Series (includes special

licket prices)

licket prices)

A Thousand Cranes Sept. 28

A Christmas Carol Dec. 7

The Foreigner Feb. 22
for ticket and subscription prices, call (249) 377-3000 or visit the Web site at www.mbthealre.com

arts, one of the biggest challenges is a graying subscription base. A new family series should tempt not only parents to bring children, but grandpar-ents. At least that's what Wicks

hopes, "We initiated focus groups that revealed people would like to attend but have children," said Wicks. "They'd like to come but need shows to do that, ones, that would allow children to sit down and listen to a story.

We're building audiences from within the family unit. We've found people are more likely to

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become subscribers if a parent or grandparent brought them than if they attended a school

or grandparent brought them than if they attended a school performance.

From the heart-wrenching yet hopeful story of A Thousand Cranes and the ever-popular Dickens tale A Christmas Carol to the comedy The Foreigner, the family-oriented line-up should draw crowds. That's important because 60 to 70 percent of the theater's budget is earned through ticket sales.

"This season we cut a shows othere's five in the season plus A Christmas Carol but were netually doing eight shows with the addition of the family series and Romeo and Juliet for student audiences, said Wicks. The new senson is a nice mix. We hope we have a little bit of everything. Our audiences are well educated, theater savty, too sophisticated to be led along by one artistic vision so many factors come into play – are wet telling a good story, is it reck-vant and will it is timulate the audience, and we look at marketability.

This year is difficult because we have to look at balancing the budget. We're a not for profit and depend on contributions for about \$1 million of the \$3.2 million budget. Because of the

ut \$1 million of the \$3.2 million budget. Because of the

economy we've only seen about half of that in contributions. In theater it always starts with money. Some starts with art. We try to find a balance between financial responsibilities and tile art form. This season definitely leans toward art form with the Shaw Festival bringing Candida to Meadow Brook Jan. 8 to Feb. 2. Wicks is in the midst of scheduling workshops for students and the public with members of the Ontario based festival to take full advantage of the residency. But after recently viewing the production about a woman who takes in a homeless poet, George Bernard Shaw's play left her wondering how audiences will respond. "Creatively and culturally it's a chance we have to take," said Wicks. 'Shaw is fun but wordy. You have to come wanting to hear Shaw."

Chance taking is what it's all about for Wicks. If shed never chosen a career as an actress and director after earning a master of fine arts degree from Lindenwood College, she would never have become the first African American venionan appointed artistic director of a major American regional theater company. But she's not

spending much time celebrating the accomplishment. Wick is too busy reading plays for the 2003-2004 season. The process of selecting the lineup concludes in December.

This season may of the sets are already designed and the cast is set for the first four shows, and half east for the rest of the season," said Wicks.

*People ask me didn't 1 get the summer off. Summer is when I get the present of the season of the season of the summer off. Summer is when I get to prepare for everything summer off. Summer is when I get to prepare for everything else, We've almost booked Romeo and Juliet just for ninth graders as part of our Outreach Program. We're helping teachers bring Shakespeare to life. There are so many things going on, My primary goal for the

next five years is establishing a working relationship with Wayne State University and the Hilberry program. We've been using graduate students coming out of the program as interns. This would allow us to keep young well trained artists in the area, and I'd like to make theater part of the undergraduate program at Oakland University so students could earn a bachelor of fine arts degree in theater or musical theater. It would allow students to spend at least one semester in residency at Meadow Brook. And I eventual Meadow Brook. And I eventual Meadow Brook. And I eventual whope to develop a master's ly hope to develop a master's degree program."

khomin@oe.homecomm.net | (734) 953-2145











