

Hot tickets

Circus in town

Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey's Greatest Show on Earth brings clowns, animal trainers, and death-defying aerial artists and more to the Palace of Auburn Hills.



Performances are 7:30 p.m. Wednesday-Saturday Oct. 2-5 and 1 and 5 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 6. Daytime shows at 11 a.m. Friday and Saturday, Oct. 4-5 and 3:30 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 4. Tickets are \$12.50, \$17.50 and \$20 with a limited number of \$30 VIP and \$45 front row seats. (248) 645-6666.

Poetry

National Writers Live at the YMCA features Yale Younger Poets Award Winner Nicholas Samaras, Vietnam Vet poet Dale Rittlerbusch, Cincinnati's Tyrone Williams and Detroit poet Laureate Naomi Long Madgett at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 3 at 7:30 p.m. at The Scarab Club, 217 East Farmsworth at John R, located east of the Detroit Institute of Arts. Free admission and parking. (313) 831-1250.

On exhibit

Kate Rossch shows recent paintings, including *Sweetheart II*, an oil on canvas. Tuesday, Oct. 11



Saturday, Nov. 2 at the Washington Street Gallery, 215 East Washington Street, Ann Arbor. The opening reception is 7-9 p.m. Friday, Oct. 4. (734) 761-2287.

Furry companions

The Detroit Zoo teams with the Michigan Humane Society this weekend to present the 10th annual Meet Your Best Friend at the Zoo. The event - which brings dogs, puppies, cats, kittens and rabbits to the zoo for adoption, runs from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 28 and 29, at the zoo, located at Woodward and the 1696 service drive in Royal Oak. The average adoption fee is \$85-\$175 per dog and \$40-\$100 per cat. (248) 398-0504.

Comedy club

Troy Davis isn't crude or rude, but spins every day experiences into humor. He kicks off the fall schedule at Joey's Comedy Club in Paisano's Restaurant, 5010 Schaefer, Dearborn. He performs Wednesday, Oct. 3-Sunday Oct. 6. Shows are at 8:30 p.m. Thursday, 8:15 and 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday and 7 p.m. Sunday. Tickets are \$8-12. (313) 584-8865.

of race

Jewish Ensemble Theatre production explores diversity issues



PHOTOS BY TOM HOFFMEYER | OBSERVER & ECCENTRIC
Director Bob Devin Jones listens intently to the dialogue exchanged between the actors playing the obsessed fan and pop music singer in *Tommy J and Sally*.

JEWISH ENSEMBLE THEATRE

What: Opens its season with *Tommy J and Sally*, Mark Medoff's play about racism, religion and personal identity in America

When: Wednesday, Oct. 2 to Sunday, Nov. 3

Where: Aaron DeRoy Theatre in the Jewish Community Center, 6600 West Maple at Drake, West Bloomfield
Tickets: \$18-\$30. Call (248) 788-2900

Season schedule

■ *Visiting Mr. Green* by Jeff Baron Dec. 4 to Jan. 5

■ *Denial* by Peter Sagal Feb. 26 to March 30

■ *The Chosen* adapted by Aaron Posner and Chaim Potok from Potok's book

Guest Artist Series

■ Conversation on the mystery of creativity with Etmore Leonard, Monika Essen and Jeff Bass 7:30 p.m. Monday, Oct. 14. Tickets for the benefit are \$50

■ *Shylock*, a one-man show starring Gareth Armstrong Nov. 6-24

■ Mosaic Youth Theatre of Detroit presents *HeartBEAT* April 5-6 Bar Mitzvah Celebration

■ A world premiere production *Jeffrey Eric Tischler's Bar Mitzvah* in honor of the theater's 13th season 6:30 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 3. Tickets begin at \$100 and include dinner and dancing.

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
STAFF WRITER

Rehearsal for the Jewish Ensemble Theatre's season opener is about to begin when Bob Devin Jones asks "when was the last time you've had a dinner discussion about race?" The question is meant to cause uneasiness just as the play he's directing. Written by Tony Award-winning playwright Mark Medoff, *Tommy J and Sally* deals with issues of race, religion and diversity in America. Like Jones, the intense drama pulls no punches as it follows Tommy J on a journey for answers.

Jones believes so strongly in the message he's traveled across the country three times to direct the two-person drama making its Midwest premiere at the Jewish Ensemble Theatre Oct. 2 to Sunday, Nov. 3, in the Aaron DeRoy Auditorium at the Jewish Community Center in West Bloomfield.

Commissioned by the Kennedy Center for its New Vision/New Voices Festival, the play focuses on Tommy J, a young African American who lived with a Jewish family for a year. Now in his early 30s, Tommy J is enraged that more than a decade earlier the daughter believed he burglarized the family's home.

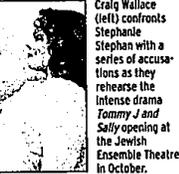
"There's scant plays that talk about cross races not written by African Americans," said Jones. "It's a contemporary play that will lead the audience to hopefully see beyond stereotypes of one another."

"Tommy J believes she's Madeline Rosenberg, the girl



whose family he lived with the last year of high school. It's loosely based on something that happened to Mark. 19 years later she becomes a famous pop star. He believes she sent out a message of reconciliation in one of her songs and breaks into her apartment. The grace is they're changed by this encounter."

One minute he's joking around the next Craig Wallace turns Tommy J's anger on Sally Hemmings, taunting her with rapid fire accusations about bobbing her nose to hide her Jewish identity. Like Jones, Wallace thinks the issues in the play need to be



spotlighted. He played one of the two lead roles twice before in professional productions including the world premiere by Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company and Theater J in Washington, D.C. Wallace has worked professionally in theater since earning a master of fine arts degree at Pennsylvania State University a decade ago.

"Mark has written such a unique character that shows his need to be loved and respected," said Wallace. "He's blaming so many people and I think in the end he learns to take responsibility for his actions. There's so many dif-

ferent facets of the character it's exhilarating to attempt.

"Mark's propensity for language is incredible. It's like Shakespearean dialogue and can be difficult to attack. My favorite part is the beginning from an intensity standpoint. Tommy J's not menacing and it's my last opportunity to relax. Once he breaks into her apartment he's on a freight train."

Unfortunately, Sally is tied to the tracks. This crazed fan, or so she thinks, has broken into her home intent on harming her. Race isn't the issue for Stephanie Stephan's character.

"Initially she's like a lot of performers - strong, confident. She's put in this situation where we see just how insecure she is," said Stephan. "As a woman, it's putting yourself into a situation where I think he's going to kill me. God willing, I'll never have to experience that. It reaffirms that women are a lot more vulnerable than most of the time they portray themselves

PLEASE SEE THEATRE, B5

Play cries for dignity of the mentally ill

Laura Gumina called me out of the blue a few weeks ago to tell me she'd written a play about living with the stigma of mental illness. I'd wondered what happened to

what happened to the Farmington Hills actress I'd interviewed often for community theater productions. Gumina explained since the last time I saw her playing one of the lead roles in Trinity House Theatre's production of *Grace & Gloria*

in Livonia a couple of years ago, she'd put on 60-70 pounds due to the "meats" she was taking to prevent another suicide attempt.

I learned Gumina could function as long she took 8-10 "meats" every morning. When she did it was possible to work with emotionally impaired and learning disabled in Southfield schools as a creative dramatics specialist.

When she didn't Gumina ended up in the hospital.

But now life was looking up. She and Southfield resident Sue Kennedy were trying to bring *Cry Dignity* to the stage. The drama is a work in progress but then, so is



The cast of *Cry Dignity* rehearses for the play dealing with the stigma of mental illness.

Gumina. She was 19 and a sophomore at Northwestern University in Illinois when the first bout of mental illness hit. Gumina finally earned a degree in elementary education from Wayne State University at the age of 37. She would try to kill herself and drop out. Throughout the years, she's been hospitalized a total of 16 times.

"I couldn't go to classes. My self-esteem was low. I was paranoid. I felt walking my dog people were

PLEASE SEE CHOMIN, B5

ALL NEW 131st Street

WATCH THEIR ATTENTION SPAN GO FROM 2 MINUTES TO 2 HOURS..

RINGLING BROS. and BARNUM & BAILEY

THE GREAT SHOW ON EARTH

OPENS NEXT WEDNESDAY!

OCT. 2-6

West OCT. 2	Thu OCT. 3	Fri OCT. 4	Sat OCT. 5	Sun OCT. 6
ALL TICKETS \$10!	7:30 PM	11:00 AM 7:30 PM	11:30 AM 3:30 PM 7:30 PM	1:00 PM 5:00 PM

Buy tickets at www.Ringling.com
Ticket Centers including Marshall Field's and The Palace Locker Room stores, Arena Box Office or call (248) 645-6666

TICKET PRICES:
\$22.50 - \$77.50 - \$200.00
Limited number of Front Row and VIP seats available. Call for details. No service charge at Arena Box Office.

Bring to you locally in part by **Sprint**.

Meet the animals up close at the Animal Open House™. Get autographs and clown around at the Three Ring Adventure™. The fun begins 90 minutes before showtime - ALL FREE with your ticket.