

CHRISTMAS

FROM PAGE B1

"With 100 cast and crew members, it's crazy back there, but you meet a lot of interesting people," said Fiandt.

"The amazing part is how much passion everyone has for the show."

Merrie Parr had so much fun skating in the show in 1999 she contacted the producer to come back this year.

The Bloomfield Hills resident not only skates with partner Scott Corbin in the New York City scene but is the "stunt Mary" who rides the donkey in for the living Nativity. Parr and Corbin are practicing for the nationals at Onyx arena in Rochester Hills.

"Riding the donkey is quite interesting," said the 24-year-old Parr. "He doesn't buck or do anything mean. He doesn't try to throw me off. And being able to skate in front of such a big crowd is one of the best experiences I've had. The audiences love the show. They get into every aspect and to see the cast and crew work together, to see how a production like this is put together is quite amazing."

Kauffman still feels the same sense of awe after producing the show for the last six years. Standing backstage at a tech rehearsal, he couldn't hide his excitement as crew waited for the cue to move the sets into place after the skating rink rose on an elevator from below the stage.

It took nine semis of props and scenery, one of lights and one of sound equipment just to get to this point. Now a series of technical problems had to be worked out.

Earlier Santa's sleigh had crashed into the scenery as it landed in the New York scene in a dry run. This was a crew rehearsal minus the high-kicking Rockettes, who later that afternoon would embark from bright yellow taxi



TECH REHEARSAL
Producer Brian Kauffman shares his excitement for behind the scenes. Here the technical crew rehearses the part where Santa arrives in New York.

cabs. The dazzle of 15,000 lights on the New York City department store front would soon be replaced by 20 Rockettes in sparkling red Santa suits.

"Unlike a touring production, we have challenges like housing and transportation because we're producing this just for Detroit," said Kauffman. "We begin in January to decide what went well. The lighting and scenery involves as much choreography backstage so they don't run into each other. Backstage safety is critical. We have drops flying on and off, big pieces of scenery moving across the stage, camels coming in. The animals are too cool. All the camels have been with us previously. We work to get them comfortable. They live in a heated tent behind the show area for weeks before the show while we're rehearsing with them. The funniest thing is we'll hear people walking out saying 'I wonder how they got those costumes so real?'"

Leading a donkey onto the stage is not always as easy as it looks said handler Rick Trimmell of Joe Heckrich's Exotic Animal Farm in Kansas where the sheep, camels, donkey and puppy have come from for the last six years. During the blessing, although all of the

animals were calm and well-behaved, one of the camels nibbled on a reporter's notebook and rain coat while Lincoln, the Sicilian donkey looked on.

"Keeping him in line can be difficult sometimes," said Trimmell who was holding onto Lincoln.

"The thing about a donkey is when they don't want to go, they don't want to go. You have to pull really hard."

lchomlin@exoticanimal.com (734) 933-245

Der Fliegende Holländer, opera in three acts by Richard Wagner (Older Classics, \$33.98) by soprano Jane Eaglen, baritone Falk Struckmann, with Daniel Barenboim conducting the Staatskapelle Berlin.

Does the world really need another recording of Wagner's first mature work, *Der Fliegende Holländer*, a retelling of the legend of the Dutchman who must sail the seas for eternity unless he finds a woman faithful unto death?

The answer in this case may depend on your devotion to Daniel Barenboim, who has issued his second complete Wagner recording in less than a year—with two of the same singers in leading roles.

Jane Eaglen, the English soprano renowned for her Brunnhilde and Isolde, is heard here as Senta, the Norwegian maiden obsessed with the Dutchman's story. She acquires herself admirably, though Barenboim's decision to restore Senta's Ballad to its original key of A minor does expose her tendency to thin out on very high notes.

But while it's nice to hear her as Senta and as Elisabeth on Barenboim's recent *Tannhäuser*,

AUDIO BITES

a record of her two signature roles would be more to the point. Tenor Peter Seiffert, who took the title role in the *Tannhäuser* album, returns here in the smaller part of Erik, Senta's jilted suitor, and sounds uncomfortable.

Baritone Falk Struckmann is an impressive Dutchman, dark-toned and solid, while bass Robert Holl is warm and hearty as Senta's father, Daland. In the small role of the Steersman, tenor Rolando Villazon reveals a rich voice of uncommon delicacy.

Barenboim's interpretation is fast-paced and muscular, in keeping with the full-speed-ahead nature of Wagner's score. But he doesn't slight the introspective passages like the Dutchman's soliloquy or his Act 2 duet with Senta.

—Mike Sherman, AP Writer

The Best of 1990-2000 (Island, \$24.98) by U2

Two years after U2 roared back to life with *All That You Can't*

Leave Behind, they've gone and reminded us just how little relevant music they produced during the 1990s.

As with the band's first best-of collection released in 1999 (covering 1980-90), this two-disc set, *The Best of 1990-2000*, is heavy with overplayed hits (*Mysterious Ways*, *Beautiful Day*). But there aren't many of the obscure nuggets that made the earlier compilation such a pleasure.

The old disc had inspired covers such as the Righteous Brothers' *Unchained Melody* and Patii Smith's *Dancing Barefoot*. Yet most of the new B-sides actually are remixes, and bloated ones at that. Hearing *Numb* the first time was enough, but was *Gimme Some More Dignity Mix* really necessary?

But *The Hands That Built America*, the theme from Martin Scorsese's upcoming film, *Gangs of New York*, is absolute drive.

—Landon Hall, AP Writer

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