UMS hosts U.S. premiere of Rushdie's 'Midnight's Children'

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
STAFF WRITER

Kenneth Fischer can't wait for the Royal Shakespeare Company's second residency for the University Musical Society and University of Michigan. And rightly so.In addition to presenting *Coriolanus*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and 70 related educational events, the University Musical Society president is coordinating the U.S. premiere of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* in association with the Royal Shakespeare Company, University of Michigan and Columbia University. After playing in Ann Arbor, Wednesday-Sunday, March 12-16, the production, based on Rushdie's best-selling novel, travels to the Apollo Theatre in New York City for five performances.

Set in modern times, *Midnight's Children* tells the story of Indian independence from Britain, and the birth of Pakistan and Bangladesh as seen through the eyes of one family. In Bombay, two babies born to Muslim and Hindu families, are switched at birth.

"I'm excited about the significance of putting an epic novel on stage," said Fischer. "As a presenter, we're concerned with advancing the art form. It was an opportunity to be involved with bringing this piece of literature onto the stage and to pool the resources of the institution to deal with the fascinating components of the book. People traveled from 30 states to see the history plays. This production should draw with its tale about history, ethnicity, strife and religion."

Ralph Williams believes all three productions offer food for thought. That's why the University of Michigan English language and literature professor is inviting students, and the community to take part in educational offerings connected with the Royal Shakespeare Company's residency including "The Plays of the Royal Residency" lecture series he's giving on Monday evenings in the Modern Languages Building (see chart).

Williams saw all of the productions in England in December and January.

"*Midnight's Children* is a global drama," said Williams. "Rushdie was born in Bombay in the midst of a mix of religions – Hindu, Muslim, Christianity – and English colonization. This was late 20th century cosmopolitan culture.

"The Shakespeare productions are spectacular and the Salman Rushdie is a major international event. In England, every child reads the book. It's one of the most important novels of the 20th century. And RSC is the premier producer of drama in the English-speaking world. The complexity of the company is astounding. Resources in terms of expertise are truly impressive."

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LECTURES AND RELATED EVENTS

- *Coriolanus* round table - 2 p.m. Tuesday, March 4, Power Center
- *Merry Wives of Windsor* round table - 2 p.m. Wednesday, March 5, Power Center
- *Midnight's Children round table* - 4 p.m. Tuesday, March 11, Rackham Auditorium.
- Insights: Behind-the-scenes lecture/demonstrations presented by Royal Shakespeare Company Education, Artistic and Technical teams - 4:30 p.m. Tuesday, March 4 (*Coriolanus*); Wednesday, March 5 (*Merry Wives of Windsor*); and Thursday, March 13 (*Midnight's Children*), Power Center.
- Interviews with Salman Rushdie - 7 p.m. Tuesday, March 11, and 11 a.m. Wednesday, March 12, Rackham Auditorium.
- Center for South Asian Studies Film Series - 6:30 p.m. Saturdays to March 8, Natural Science Auditorium.

For complete listing of events, visit www.umich.edu/pres/rsc.

Related event:

- "The Plays of the Royal Residency" - 7 p.m. Mondays though April 14, Modern Languages Building Auditorium 3. No registration required for public observation, call Pattie Ray) (734) 647-6771.

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DELIVER US FROM EVA (R) NV
THE RECRUIT (PG13) NV
FINAL DESTINATION II (R) NV
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ROYAL VISIT

FROM PAGE B1

life especially if audiences have never seen or read the play. Farr's had plenty of experience with Shakespeare's political plays. In *Coriolanus* he goes for the visual aesthetic to create a complete theatrical world in which the viewer is plunged.

"We begin with a specific world, with a specific set of values, where if you're not born of a certain class, tough," said Farr. "It answers the profound question about the role of democracy. I'm in my early 30s and my generation doesn't have the same faith in democracy. We don't believe our politicians. This production casts doubt. It asks the motives of elected tribunes. It has a lot to say about war. Back then war was a way of life. Now when people do things it's in name of democracy. It's a very interesting play that debates moral compromise."

CHANGING TIMES

War plays a minor role in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Set in the late 1940s, the comedy focuses on the struggle that takes place between men and women with the return of the soldiers. The production originally opened in October at Stratford-upon-Avon.

MARQUET HUDSON

A cast of 20 actors, most of whom are of Asian descent, is featured in the U.S. premiere of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*.

"It's meant to be entertaining, a fun night out for everybody," said Kavanaugh. "I wanted to find a setting that an audience could have access to. It's an era they could easily recognize from movies or photos.

"In England this was a time of great social change and women getting power. For the first time they were working outside of the home and when the men returned from the war they were not about to give that up."

Richard Cordery plays Sir John Falstaff, the burly, fun-loving rogue first seen in *Henry the IV, Part 1*. It was due to a special request from Queen Elizabeth I that Shakespeare decided to have the character reappear in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

"There's lots of mischief-making and glimpses of the kind of despair Falstaff falls into in *Henry IV, Part 1*. He's exactly the same. It's the people around him who have changed," said Kavanaugh.

"As a director there were lots of challenges. It's written nearly all in prose. It is about a small English world. The language is eccentric. I had to find a way in. I thought Richard (Cordery) had the right qualities for the role. He's a serious classical actor whose a lot of fun, and comfortable with Falstaff's words. All we had to add was lots of padding to him. Richard's not that rotund."

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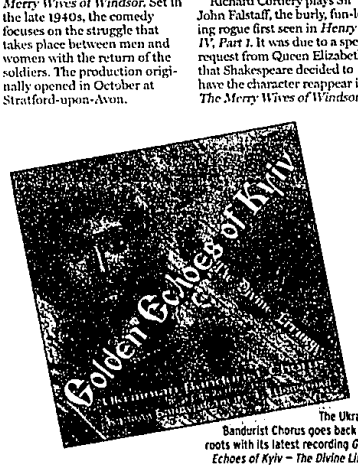

The Ukrainian Bandurist Chorus goes back to its roots with its latest recording *Golden Echoes of Kyiv – The Divine Liturgy*.

CD

FROM PAGE B1

the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris to introduce the CD. On April 6, they'll sing at a noon church service in Immaculate Conception Ukrainian Catholic Church, corner 11672 McDougall at Connor, in Hamtramck.

Local churches have always supported the Ukrainian Bandurist Chorus since it set down roots in Detroit in 1949. George Korol remembers St. Mary the Protectress Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral in Southfield supporting the chorus from the time he arrived here from a displaced persons camp in Germany in 1950.

In addition to offering rehearsal space and music lessons, the church paid CD production costs as a memorial to the late Sylvia Blake of Birmingham. The Rev. Pavlo Bodnarchuk of Farmington, a priest at the parish, is featured on the CD. Dozens of parishioners have belonged to the chorus over the years.

"We still try to maintain our cultural heritage," said Korol, president of the parish council at St. Mary Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral. "I remember the music growing up. The Ukrainian Bandurist Chorus toured the camps. I heard the music in church services in the camps. The CD is beautiful music. I listen to it when I'm relaxing, trying not to be occupied with everyday concerns. It's very soothing."

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