

Barn Theaters Flourish During The Summertime

More than a dozen established summer theaters in Michigan will offer stage plays and musicals this season, with many featuring professional actors.

However, there are other towns which offer community theaters featuring local talent operating during the summer.

Dean of the summer theater circuit is the Barn Theater near Augusta, between Kalamazoo and Battle Creek, now open for its 27th season with 12 plays scheduled through early September.

Located west of Augusta on M-96, the theater is concrete-and-wood proof of Jack and Betty Ragotzy's success story. In 1949, after three years of operating in Kalamazoo, they obtained and moved to their present site, a never-completed dairy barn.

Today's Barn Theater, an impressive red structure, is surrounded by a complex of other production buildings, acres of green grass and white fences.

One of the most colorful summer theater productions is in downtown Coldwater, near the junction of US-12 and I-69. Seven Broadway plays are offered through August in the Historic, 600-seat Tibbits Opera House.

Built by Coldwater Mayor Bart S. Tibbits in 1882, the Opera House for nearly 30 years presented some of the big names of the theater. Converted to a movie house in the 1920s, the theater later was slated for demolition but was purchased by local citizens to restore as a community enterprise.

The Tibbits Opera Foundation, a non-profit organization, was organized in 1963 and nearly \$170,000 has been invested so far in the continuing restoration program.

Since 1955, Ruth Bailey Swigart, a Cincinnati housewife, has been the energetic organizer and manager of the successful Cherry County Playhouse in Traverse City, one of the state's best-known summer theaters.

Now in its 18th season, the Cherry County theater traces its beginnings to tent performances which nonetheless attracted some of the big names in show business -- Joe E. Brown, Andy Devine, Reginald Gardiner, Edward Everett Horton, Pat O'Brien and Cesar Romero among them.

The 1972 season, which runs from July through early September, will include Frank Sutton, Buddy Ebsen and Pat Paulsen among its performers.

The Traverse City playhouse is part of the multi-million dollar

Park Place Motor Inn, at East State and Park Streets, two blocks south of US-31.

Another feature of the Cherry County Playhouse is the children's plays on Friday mornings presented by the Cherry County Junior Players. If you have shopping or errands in Traverse City, it's a safe place to leave your youngsters, according to the theater management.

For 12 years, the Grand Rapids Circle Theater operated in hotels, but in 1964 arrangements were made with the Grand Rapids Department of Parks to lease the pavilion in John Ball Park. The theater opened in its new home a year later.

The 1972 season is now under way and continues through the end of August. The Lollipop Theater, with a separate director, presents plays for children. The Circle Theater also awards an annual scholarship to a college student pursuing a theatrical career.

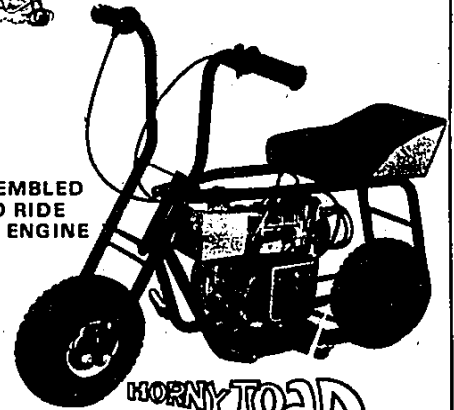
Another theater housed in a barn is the Red Barn Theater, three miles south of Saugatuck. Eight plays are offered through early September. The management also offers puppet shows for children on Wednesdays and children's theater, daily workshop and classes.

Summer theaters in Observerland include:

- FARMINGTON PLAYERS, INC., 32332 12 Mile, Farmington. Contact Mrs. Stuart Orman, 49550 Sugar Spring, Farmington.
- LATHRUP PLAYERS, Lathrup Village. Contact Tom Macon, 28615 Bloomfield, Lathrup Village.
- LIVONIA-REDFORD THEATER GUILD, 15138 Beech Daly, Redford Township. Contact Mrs. John D. Foster, 16772 Country Club Drive, Livonia.
- PLYMOUTH THEATER GUILD, Central Junior High School, Church and Main, Plymouth. Contact Mrs. Louis Cyburt, 5825 Lotz Road, Plymouth.
- SOUTHFIELD COMMUNITY PLAYERS, Southfield. Contact Mrs. Thomas Palmer, 1104 Dreon, Clawson.
- WAYNE-WESTLAND CIVIC THEATER, 1340 Harvey, Westland. Contact Fred Button, 35042 Hees, Livonia.

For brochures describing each summer theater and its schedule of plays, write or call the manager of the theater in which you may have interest.

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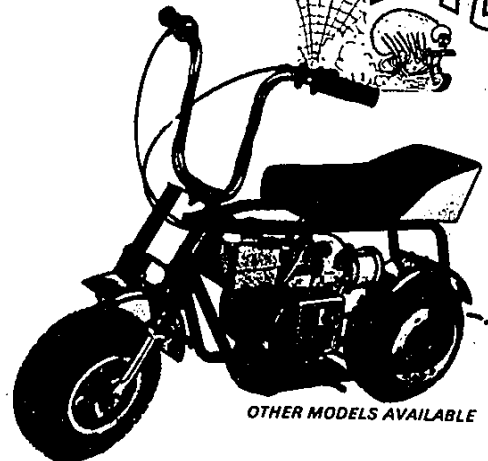
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