

Arts & Entertainment

TAKE THE STAGE



Secret Garden's Star Blooms at Cranford Dramatic Club Community Theatre

By SUSAN MYRILL DOUGHERTY
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

CRANFORD — "What happens to dead people?" asks Mary Lennox (Lindsay Maron) in Cranford Dramatic Club (CDC) Community Theatre's *The Secret Garden*. We find the answer in the 1995 Tony-award-winning musical with music by Lucy Simon and book and lyrics by Marsha Norman.

Be ready to flit from the foggy world of ghosts and spirits to Misselthwaite Manor, a Victorian mansion in North Yorkshire, England, in CDC's latest production.

While the lush tones of the orchestra play the overture, the stage is eerily lit to reveal Mary Lennox's dream sequence. The pubescent girl is in India in 1906 when a cholera epidemic devastates an English compound in Bombay.

Mary awakens to the reality that her mother, father and all of the people she knows in the compound have died from it.

She is sent to live in the Victorian mansion with her Uncle Archibald Craven (Russ Crespolini), a hunchback who has been depressed over the death of his young wife, Lily, who died in childbirth ten years ago. He can't get over the death of Lily, the sister of Mary's mother.

Mary meets chambermaid Martha (Melissa Loderstedt), who invites her to play outside in the gardens of the mansion.

Mary's spirits lift when she meets Ben (Thom Korner), the gardener, who describes a mysterious garden that once belonged to her aunt Lily but has been locked since the woman's death.

Inspired, Mary asks her uncle if she might have a bit of earth for her own to plant the seeds that Dickon (Derek Rocchini) has given her. The

request seems to unlock powerful memories in Archibald, who sings a poignant "A Bit of Earth."

Unlike a pruned English garden, the plot of this *Garden* has twists and tangles. Upon first viewing, an audience might be confused with the frequent dream sequences.

Original designs for the show called for the proscenium and portals on stage to be replicas of a Victorian children's theatre, complete with layers of overlapping images of birds, animals and flowers, to set an imaginative tone.

Director Maurice Moran and the set design/decoration team did not go that route, but they utilize the front portals on either side of the orchestra as Mary Lennox and her cousin Colin's respective, efficiently planned bedrooms.

A well-appointed library in the mansion and an interesting overgrown garden that blossoms at the end are part of revolving set pieces.

The show's costuming is first rate, with authentic looking frocks for the ghosts and Mary especially.

Danielle Aldrich-Babic's choreography with ghosts called "Dreamers" walking in patterns that trace the mazes of the garden is appropriately stark. A cameo appearance by Jon Mantes as Fakir displays his athletic dancing form.

This production is resplendent with soaring voices—choral as well as duet, trio and solo—all under the direction of Musical Director Sue Chandler.

Sarah Asplund (as ghost Lily Craven) is heavenly, with a lyric soprano voice with rich notes that float effortlessly. Ms. Asplund's duets with equally outstanding mezzo-soprano Maureen Monroe (Rose Lennox) are delightful.

Jim Finnegan's clear tenor voice as

Albert Lennox adds dimension for the trio's beautiful reprise of "A Bit of Earth."

Loderstedt's chambermaid Martha is not only credible with a consistent accent, but also emotionally powerful with the use of her glorious voice that shines in "If I had a Fine White Horse" and spectacularly in "Hold On."

Volatile chemistry exists between the talented Colin Craven (Steven Bunin) and cousin Mary Lennox. Their first explosive exchange rings true of young children angrily trying to top each other, which is a mere mask of fear of rejection.

Like pesky dandelions, a problem that reappears yearly in musicals at CDC is sound imbalance. Despite the additional professional audio equipment, voices and the orchestra were in a tug of war and the voices, at times, lost.

Ah, but like a tender rose budding in early summer, scene-stealer, the multitalented actress/singer Maron is the brightest star of this dark show.

She never drops that flawless British accent, although she is on stage for 90 percent of the time. With a porcelain doll face and heartbreakingly delicate soprano voice, she makes the production worth seeing.

Hulsen Demonstrates Still Life in Acrylic

SCOTCH PLAINS — The Scotch Plains and Fanwood Arts Association will meet on Thursday, May 24, at 7 p.m. in the Scotch Plains Library, located at 1927 Bartle Avenue.

A brief business meeting will perceive a demonstration and workshop on still life in acrylic.

Demonstrator Joseph Hulsen had a long career as an engineer before turning to art after receiving a gift of colored pencils from his son. He exhibits his work regularly in group and solo shows and has won many awards locally. He has contributed his artistic gifts to the community by critiquing for the Teen Arts Festival and has served on the boards of a number of art associations.

His work includes themes of waterscapes, natural images, studies of buildings and abstracts.

The demonstration is free and open to the public. For more information, contact Tom Yeager at (908) 322-5438.



BACK TO THE OLD HOUSE...This charming Stoneleigh Park Tudor was one of five Westfield residences showcased for the Friends of the WSO's annual Tour of Notable Homes last weekend.

Notable Homes Tour Features Diversity of Styles, Treasures

By CHRISTIE STORMS
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD — From priceless original works of art to antique treasures or even a swimming pool in the middle of a family room, the Friends of the Westfield Symphony Orchestra's (WSO) annual Notable Homes Tour offered a wide range of sights to behold last weekend.

Sharon Zydney, home tour co-chair, discussed the home-selection process with *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times*, citing that the committee looks for diversity in architectural design, as well as décor and unique features, to provide "something for everyone."

Those who appreciate the grand scale, spaciousness, and modern amenities of newer construction could admire the soaring 19-foot windows and open floor plan of the stately brick-front center hall colonial on Lawrence Avenue.

Built in 1998, the home featured several fireplaces, a massive kitchen completely open to a family room decorated with southwestern flair, and displays of original art works by both Erte and Chihuly.

The luxuries extended into the outdoors with a sunny conservatory off the first-floor master suite, where one might view the babbling ravine and charming footbridge featured in the backyard, or with the regal French doors in the study and dining room that lead to a unique front terrace.

After observing the contemporary and eclectic stylings of the living and dining rooms in the Breeze Knoll home, visitors could behold the family room's highlighted feature...a full-size heated swimming pool.

The pool was also open to the homeowner's office space and featured an electric cover that could hold the weight of several adults. The floors throughout the space were

raw granite with radiant heat.

The homeowner explained to *The Leader/Times* that she chose to integrate the pool into the family's living space to maintain an open, spa-like atmosphere rather than close it off in a separate room like that of a typical indoor pool at a gym. She credited the powerful dehumidification system for keeping chlorine and other associated odors at bay.

Waterfalls gently cascaded down each side of a bridge, which crossed over the pool to connect to an outdoor deck, where one could enjoy views of magnificent blooms and a goldfish pond, all meticulously tended to by her husband.

Visitors could additionally purchase plants at this property.

The circa-1937 Wychwood Road residence appeared the epitome of timeless elegance and classic colonial style. A mix of historically-influenced wallpapers, fabrics and rich colors flowed seamlessly from room to room, leading the visitors past treasured antiques, such as a unique "lion's head" settee originally belonging to the homeowner's great-grandmother.

A recent addition integrated modern conveniences such as an angular kitchen island, stainless appliances and a wet bar, but classic details such as wooden window cornices, antique light fixtures, Windsor chairs and wide-plank flooring flawlessly unified the new rooms with the existing structures.

Upstairs, the master bedroom boasted exquisite custom built-in shelving and cabinetry, including a unique crown molding design that extended outward over each window treatment. One of the children's rooms incorporated a safari theme, complete with a hand-painted personalized wall mural, as well as cultural artifacts such as carved animals and masks. Another bedroom featured

children's-themed toile wallpaper, a window seat and magnificent vintage dollhouse set upon a skirted table.

Stunning architecture was accentuated throughout the gracious home from the dark paneled study to the gleaming white chair rails, casings and mantels, including one that opened to reveal a TV above the fireplace in the master suite.

Live cello music softly wafted from the dining room, adding to the ambiance of this remarkable home.

The tour also featured two Tudor homes, but each exhibited its own unique personality and grace.

A storybook stone path welcomed visitors to the Shadowlawn Drive home. Abundant moldings in deep shades of chestnut were resplendent, leading visitors toward a special custom alcove surrounding the grand fireplace.

Interior designer Helene Reichlin told *The Leader/Times* that the living room was purposely divided into three separate seating areas and that the window treatments were artfully blended in with the wall color to allow the woodwork and fireplace to remain the focal point.

The dining room, which was wallpapered in a William Morris "Iris" pattern, was inspired by matching table linen fabric Ms. Reichlin had acquired in Europe.

Stepping through the recently updated Tuscan-inspired kitchen, a new family room addition featured richly detailed draperies, and their vine patterns were hand-painted to extend upward onto the ceiling and to serve as a unique chandelier medallion.

After exiting through the French doors to the patio, guests could participate in the 50/50 raffle.

At the Stoneleigh Park cottage-style charmer, string-textured wallpaper and an eye-catching hand-painted furniture piece welcomed guests into the foyer. The home featured a warm palette of golds and corals with soft greens such as that of the marble fireplace surround and sumptuous silk draperies highlighted by unique "bubble" tuks created by tiny hand-sewn flower embellishments.

The new kitchen featured an abundance of textures from the hand-planed heartwood pine island top, brick fireplace and wooden planked tables derived from the siding of old school houses and barns.

A distinctive accordion-style French door lead to the spacious basement, which was divided into a seating area and entertaining enclave with two-tier wet bar and game table. The cork floors set off the mission-style furnishings, built-ins and artwork.

The unique bathroom featured traditional floral wallpaper with a dramatic ebony background further highlighted by bath fixtures in the same shade.

Refreshments were served outside on this home's terrace.

Ms. Zydney expressed her gratitude for all those involved with this fundraiser, which benefited the WSO.

"I want to sincerely thank all of the people who come out to support us every year and all of the volunteers who helped," she said.

She added that those who would like to become involved with the Friends of the WSO can contact executive director Elizabeth Ryan at (908) 232-9400.

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Funding has been made possible in part through a grant by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, Department of State, a partner agency of the National Endowment for the Arts.

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'Rattled' Author Visits WF's Town Bookstore

WESTFIELD — The Town Book Store in Westfield will host a meet-and-greet for author Debra Galant on Saturday, May 12, from 2 to 4 p.m. Her book, "Rattled," a satire about class moms, animal rights and the McMansionization of the New Jersey countryside, was inspired by a January 2002 *New York Times* column she wrote about the endangered timber rattlesnake.

Set in the fictional subdivision of Galapagos Estates, "Rattled" is about what happens when soccer moms, animal rights activists, dishonest real-estate developers and endangered species fight for ascendancy in the rapidly developing New Jersey suburbs.

Those coming to the store, located at 270 East Broad Street (corner of East Broad and Elmer Streets), can meet the author. Anyone unable to attend can call The Town Book Store at (908) 233-3535 to reserve an autographed copy.