



Get Outta The House

By CAROL F. DAVIS
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

The First Unitarian Society of Plainfield will present a "Grand Night for Singing" on Saturday, April 6, at 7:30 p.m. Presented by the Little Opera Company of New Jersey and the Church Choir, this concert will be filled with your opera favorites, like Puccini, Mozart, Donizetti, and more. Languages will range from Hebrew and Italian to English and Zulu. Performers include Juan and Valerie Pineda, Deborah Gordon, John and Rachel Hawkins, Allan Reading, and Vladimir Goodev. Admission is \$10, and a reception follows the performance. Call (908) 756-0750 for more information. Tenors, sopranos, and baritones, oh my!

If you'd prefer to participate in an evening event, the Westfield Coalition for the Arts will host a Fabulous 50's Dance on Saturday night, April 6, from 7:30 to 11:30 p.m. It's at the Clark Veterans of Foreign Wars Hall at 6 Broadway, and admission is \$20 per person. "Satin and Gold" will offer some live tunes, and there will be lots to eat and drink, including subs, salads, chips, desserts, beer, wine, and soda. Proceeds benefit the Westfield Fine Arts Program and its students. Seating will be limited, so reserve now by calling Linda at (908) 789-4417. Don't forget your dance shoes.

Next weekend offers yet another opportunity to enjoy opera, as St. Michael's Rosary Society sponsors a repeat of last year's sold out *Opera Cabaret* at St. Michael's Church in Cranford on Friday, April 12, at 7 p.m. Members of the New Jersey State Opera will perform excerpts from *La Traviata* by Verdi and *Lucia Di Lammermoor* by Donizetti, along with narration by pianist David Maiullo. They will also perform popular show tunes, in case you missed Liza's wedding. There will be refreshments following the show. Tickets may be purchased by calling (908) 276-0360 or (908) 276-1249, and the proceeds go to charitable organizations.

Grease has been a hit musical since it debuted in 1972, and it still draws a crowd. The Cranford Repertory Theatre's production can be seen on Friday and Saturday nights at 8 p.m. on April 12, 13, 19, and 20, and on Sunday afternoons at 2 p.m. on the 14th and 21st. It may not have John and Olivia in the leading roles, but it does showcase a diverse and talented cast from all over New Jersey, as they bring you back to Rydell High in 1959. Tickets are \$8-\$12. Buy them in Cranford, Westfield, and Garwood. For locations call (908) 272-1704 or (908) 276-4487.

On Wednesday, April 10, the Musical Club of Westfield will present an afternoon recital in the sanctuary of the First Baptist Church, 170 Elm Street, at 1 p.m. The program will feature the Westfield High School String Ensemble, along with vocal and instrumental soloists. The first piece will be *Brahms's Sextet No. 2 in G Major, op. 36*, with much more to follow. Refreshments will be served. Evelyn will be happy to give you more information. Call her at (908) 232-2173.

Matthias Düwel

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He has received awards from the Pollack-Krasner Foundation, German Academic Exchange Service and a Master of Fine Arts Degree from Hochschule der Kunst in Berlin.

"Cathedrals" will be exhibited at Union County College's Tomasulo Gallery, located on the first floor of the McKay Library at 1033 Springfield Avenue, Cranford until Thursday, April 18. Gallery hours are 1 to 4 p.m., Mondays through Thursdays, and on Saturdays. Evening hours are 6 to 9 p.m., Tuesdays through Thursdays.

For more information, please contact the Tomasulo Gallery at (908) 709-7155.

ARTS ENTERTAINMENT



BEAUTY IS INTERIOR...The Friends of the Westfield Symphony Orchestra (WSO) invites the public to join them on Saturday, May 4, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. for their 18th Annual Tour of Notable Homes, during which Westfield's most endearing residences will be opened wide in welcome. All funds raised will benefit the WSO and its educational outreach programs, which educate over 2,000 pupils through concerts and master classes. Tickets are \$20 in advance or \$25 on the day of the event. Tickets are available at Lancaster, Ltd., Baron's Drug Store, Coldwell Banker Realtors, Weichert Realtors, Burgdorff Realtors, Prudential New Jersey Realty, The Town Bank of Westfield, and other town locations. For more information, please call (908) 232-9400 or visit www.westfieldnj.com/wso.

Professionals and Volunteers Lend Expertise at Teen Arts Festival

By MARYLOU MORANO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

COUNTY — The Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders recently held 2002 Teen Arts Festival, a two-

day celebration of the arts at Union County College's Cranford campus.

Over 500 pieces of artwork, created by middle school and high school students in all artistic disciplines,

were exhibited, shown or performed.

In addition, students had an opportunity to participate in workshops and have their work critiqued by a professional artist.

The festival was sponsored in conjunction with the Union County Division of Cultural and Heritage Affairs, as well as many other supporting county agencies. The students participated in performances, seminars, master classes and workshops in every discipline, including visual arts, music, creative writing, theater and dance.

"The Teen Arts Festival is not a competition," explained Kimberly Leary, Teen Arts Coordinator. "It is a way for students in Union County to see what other students in their same age range are doing artistically."

Art teachers in all of the county's public, private and parochial schools were invited to recruit their students to be a part of Teen Arts Festival.

Students were able to participate in workshops such as quilting, basketry, watercolor techniques, composite sketching and mixed media collage, among many other offerings.

The program provides students with an opportunity to interact with professional artists and receive feedback on their work to see what is needed to take it to the next level, said Leary. The professional artists are compensated monetarily for their time.

Leary reaches out to the artistic community throughout the state to recruit the professionals who participate in the Teen Arts Festival.

Westfield resident Sondra Tammam has been a long time Teen Arts Festival piano critiquer. Tammam has performed in Europe, Asia, North Africa and Israel, in addition to the United States.

Joining the professional artists, volunteers also assisted with workshops and provided short demonstrations and interactive arts activities.

Forty pieces of art were chosen from the Teen Arts Festival Exhibit to become a touring exhibit and will be displayed at public libraries, municipal buildings, corporate settings and other community locations throughout Union County.

The 2002 Teen Arts Festival was made possible by many corporate sponsors and private supporters, as well as grants from the New Jersey State Department of Education and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.



POPCORN™ The Rookie: Take Me Out to A Better Movie

One Popcorn, Poor • Two Popcorns, Fair • Three Popcorns, Good • Four Popcorns, Excellent

By MICHAEL S. GOLDBERGER
2 popcorns

As the reels roll, you hope for *The Rookie* to get better. Maybe director John Lee Hancock's dramatization of a true story will pick up in the next scene. After all, this is baseball. It's the national pastime. Would you give short shrift to Mom, or apple pie for that matter? So you hang in there, even though it's like rooting for a favorite last place team to win the pennant.

The romantic in you senses it's the right time to do. But the realist in you is sure glad you haven't bet the rent money on it. Because if you did, you'd be homeless.

Based on the real-life tale of relief pitcher Jim Morris, the Texas high school teacher who made it to the major leagues when he was in his 30s, it is the fantasy aspect of the tale that sustains matters even when the movie is off committing a host of filmic errors.

But after the magic of the event wears off, there's no mistaking screenwriter Mike Rich's lackluster script for the more effervescent penning it would have to be to pull this effort out of the doldrums. Likewise, any motion picture umpire would agree that it would take a far more imaginative treatment from Hancock to energize the otherwise drab doings.

While we're cleaning house for next season, getting someone other than the miscast Randy Quaid to play the title role would also figure in a winning strategy.

While Quaid is an actor of doubtless skill, he's uncomfortably recognizable here. You see, though Morris' story is true, its lure is in the realization of an impossible dream. And impossible dreams are vicariously best enjoyed when the beneficiary is an everyman.

Of course Jimmy Stewart and Tom Hanks are the exceptions that prove the rule. The characters they play can entertain fantasies real or fictional. Because, quite simply, it's their regular Joe appeal that made them stars in the first place.

Quaid, on the other hand, is primarily intense. He's also earnest. But he's no everyman. And while it would have been a box office risk for the sake of artistry, this was an opportune time for Disney to make some newcomer's fantasy come true.

Who knows? Maybe such creative bread cast upon the waters might then be repaid with a very thankful performance. Voila! A star is born. And in the meantime director Hancock could have supplied the requisite celebrity power via a known commodity (read Duvall, Dennehy or maybe even Sutherland) in a strong supporting role.

As it so happens, the only performance worth mentioning is a good secondary stint submitted by Brian Cox, a familiar enough face, but alas, not possessing the sort of name recognition that a spot on the marquis requires.

The veteran Scottish actor plays Jim's miserably unresponsive dad, an army lifer who views his offspring's obsession with baseball as just so much floundering.

The script flirts with a few clues that might explain the father-son disconnection, but ultimately withdraws its half-posed theories without providing any serious enlightenment. Instead, it settles for depicting Jim Morris, Sr. as a career failure, the living repre-

sentation of nothing ventured, nothing gained.

So it only follows that when Jim junior spies a second shot at the majors, but isn't sure whether or not to lunge for the brass ring at this late stage of the game, he seeks validation from his father. It's as if he's hoping that this magical opportunity might also be accompanied by an epiphany in his ambivalent dad. Sadly, it is not.

The older Morris coldly suggests that a failed attempt at glory now might appear foolish. And maybe for a second the left-handed pitcher thinks to choose the security of failure. But he can't. Not only because his obsession for baseball has never died. Not only to prove that he is cut from a different piece of cloth than his downtrodden dad. But also because of the promise he made to the rag-tag baseball team he coaches.

Following shoulder surgery, the ballplayer's previously damaged arm now appears to be better than ever. He's throwing fastballs at 90 mph plus. It's a miracle. And this information is not lost on the stereotypical bunch of hopelessly players who comprise the poorly equipped high school team.

Morris has become an inspiration, something to rally around and champion. As one young ballplayer puts it in a bit of plainspoken but nonetheless inspired eloquence, it is doubtful that any of them will even get a college scholarship. But at least their coach may have a chance at the big time.

So here's the deal the boys tender: If they win the state district championship, then the much-adulated mentor has to try out for the major leagues. It's a true story, so you can guess the rest.

Problem is, in the movies the truth can hurt if it's applied with too much of a vengeance and not enough embellishment to make it swallow smoothly. Make it too dry and it's bound to get stuck in our collective craw, no matter how well intentioned.

Therefore, adorning the actual exploits of our movie subjects with a bit of dramatic filigree is a Hollywood tradition. It's the way we like it. Otherwise we'd only watch documentaries, those Classic Comics of the motion picture industry.

Certainly, what poetic license might have been acceptable in one era may seem inappropriate in another. Which readily calls to mind William Bendix in the overly sappy but nevertheless unforgettable *Babe Ruth Story* (1948). Its schmaltzy excess would be indefensible today, and yet we wouldn't change such telling moments of movie history for the world.

Because the fact is, how much directorial exaggeration we're willing to accept says as much about us as it does about the heroes of our bio-pics.

Hence each generation has a style and quantity of overstatement that it's willing to accept along with its depictions of reality. But whether or not Hancock understands this tacit agreement between director and audience, it's apparent *The Rookie* isn't willing to play ball.

The Rookie, rated G, is a Buena Vista Pictures release directed by John Lee Hancock and stars Randy Quaid, Rachel Griffiths and Brian Cox. Running time: 105 minutes.

RANT

Preoccupations With Celebrity: Have Our Priorities Changed Since 9-11?

By FRED ROSSI
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Life will never be the same, we were told on September 11. We Americans will focus anew on the really important things in life and turn away from much of the silliness and frivolities of the 1990s.

Six months later, things have indeed changed. After a few months of this new paradigm — where we flew flags, saluted heroes, cheered the war effort and embraced family and friends a little tighter — we have again come to our senses and remembered what is really important to us.

We watched with our breaths held to see whether David Letterman would take his late night show to ABC and supplant Ted Koppel. We wondered whether Russell Crowe was threatening his Oscar chances with his boorish behavior.

We lamented the news that Oprah would wrap up her talk show in 2006. We were shocked that Sally Jesse Raphael's show was unceremoniously yanked off the air.

We eagerly awaited the big boxing match on TV. Not the one with Mike Tyson, but the one between Amy Fisher and Tonya Harding. And how dare Fisher's parole board forbid her from taking part! Paula Jones was a suitable replacement, though. And the match between Greg Brady and Danny Partridge was must-see TV.

Speaking of Tyson, just what is it that bothers him so much about 99.99 percent of the human race? We've also wondered about the implications on our democracy of Gary Condit's defeat.

What about the ramifications of

Rosie O'Donnell's big news? Is the fairytale relationship between Britney Spears and that boy band guy really over? Talk magazine folded? It made the front page of all the papers.



Rosie O'Donnell

How on earth will we find out about all the exciting things Tina Brown is doing? Wouldn't it have been a good idea for Liza Minnelli's wedding to have been nationally televised? Tricia Nixon got one and so did Lady Diana.

But the nuptials of Judy Garland's daughter — with a guest list that included Donald Trump, Whitney Houston, Phyllis Diller, Liz Taylor, Michael Jackson and Vicki Carr — would have made for the funniest Saturday night television since the Archie Bunker era.

What other vital matters have we been focusing on in this new world? Britain's Prince Harry smokes pot? It was shocking to hear of an 18-year-old kid doing such a

thing. And, hey, does that store security camera really exonerate Winona Ryder?

It's good to know that the more things have changed, the more they've really remained the same. America is back to almost normal, and that may be a good thing.

If only the Bush daughters would act up again, then the world would truly be perfect.



Liza Minelli

WYACT Auditions to Commence April 13 for Two Productions

WESTFIELD — The Westfield Young Artists' Cooperative Theater (WYACT) and the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) will reunite in July to present the classic musical *South Pacific* at NJPAC's Victoria Theatre in Newark. Tickets will go on sale this month for the play, which will run from Friday, July 12 to Monday, July 22.

Singing auditions will be held at the Westfield Community Players (WCP), 1000 North Avenue in Westfield on Saturday, April 13, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., and at NJPAC on Sunday, April 14, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Callbacks will be given Saturday, April 27, at NJPAC. Singers should bring a photo of themselves with sheet music in the correct key.

WYACT Artistic Director Cynthia Meryl is especially searching for the part of Emile De Becque, a bass/baritone with acting skills, who can appear to be 32-35.

South Pacific commemorates the centennial anniversary of composer Richard Rodgers, with classic songs like "Some Enchanted Evening," "I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Out of My Hair," and "I'm In Love With a Wonderful Guy."

"We are especially proud and delighted that, following the engagement of *South Pacific* this summer, the production will tour to the Algonquin Arts Theatre (AAT) in Manasquan for an additional run. Considering the need for arts funding, this kind of networking is key to theatre's survival."

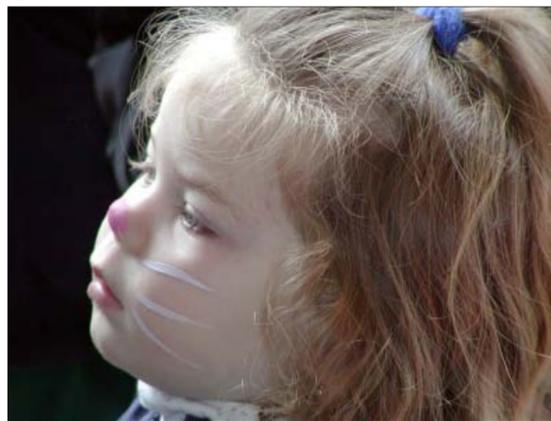
At AAT, *South Pacific* will run from Friday, July 26, to Sunday, August 4.

WYACT's production is presented as part of the NJPAC Arts Education Department's Summer Musical Production Program.

Phillip Thomas, Vice President of Arts Education at NJPAC stated, "We are very excited to partner once again with WYACT on *South Pacific*, our fifth production as a result of our partnership, and the performances just keep getting better."

WYACT, in association with AAT, will present the musical comedy *Dames at Sea* from Wednesday, August 14, to Sunday, August 18. An all-singing, all-dancing, high-camp tap extravaganza with a cast of six, *Dames* is based on the nostalgia of 1930s Hollywood musicals.

Auditions for *Dames* will be held at WCP on April 13 from 2 to 5 p.m. and at AAT, 60 Abe Voorhees Drive in Manasquan, on Thursday, April 11, from 3 to 6 p.m. and 7 to 10 p.m. Callbacks will be Saturday, April 20, at WCP. Participants should bring a photo of themselves with sheet music in the



BUNNY WONDER...A little girl looks on while having her face painted during the festivities at the Annual Fanwood Easter Egg Hunt on Saturday morning, March 30.

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