

Arts & Entertainment

WELLMAN, MUSIC MENTOR, TO RETIRE

West Side Story to Debut At SPFHS on March 11

SCOTCH PLAINS — As Scotch Plains Fanwood High School (SPFHS) opens this year's annual musical show *West Side Story* on Friday, March 11, the parents and students of the Scotch Plains-Fanwood school district will also begin to bid farewell to musical mentor Laurie Wellman, who is closing out a decade as music director and show producer at the school. Performances will also be held on

with the show, *Guys and Dolls*. In the decade since then, largely through the growing popularity of shows she directed, she won not only admiration but widespread community support that enabled the mounting of ever more ambitious productions.

The 2004 show, *Les Miserables*, was a musically demanding opera, which until that year had not been available for school productions in this area. As music director and producer that year and this year, Ms. Wellman engaged Tom Pedas as drama director. Mr. Pedas has directed dozens of acclaimed community shows in central New Jersey over the past decades.

"The greatest reward has been to see students enter ninth grade, unsure of themselves but with raw talent, then leave in a few years confident as people and performers," said Ms. Wellman.

Attesting Ms. Wellman's strong influence, students at spring concerts routinely overflow with speeches, gratitude and bouquets. "As students move on," Ms. Wellman added, "the bonds created through music will always bring them joy and knowledge. I feel blessed, fortunate and proud to have been a part of the SPFHS Music Department for the past 24 years."

District music department head, Vincent Turturiello reflected on the decades in which Ms. Wellman has been his partner in the music program.

"It's rewarding to a teacher when dozens of students return and say what a positive, personal difference the teacher has made in their lives," Mr. Turturiello said. "That is the kind of teacher Laurie Wellman is. Like many SP-F teachers, she devotes hours far beyond the requirements, and her career shows how much students and the community gain from their extraordinary commitment."

For tickets to *West Side Story*, please call (908) 322-9616.



Photo Courtesy of Carmella Resnick

LET'S GET READY TO RUMBLE... The Jets gang plans a rumble, in the Scotch Plains Fanwood High School production of *West Side Story* set to debut March 11. Gang leader Riff, played by Matt Capodicasa, outlines a plan to fellow gang members, clockwise from lower left, Anthony Saraceno, Zack Hvizdak, Samuel Slaugh, Steve Carroll, and John DeLuca.

the evenings of March 12, 17, 18 and 19, with an afternoon performance on Sunday, March 13.

Spanning two weekends of performances, the *West Side Story* production features a cast of 45 students. The story, set in the 1950s, tells of rival gangs and bystanders on Manhattan turf that is now the environs of Lincoln Center. Neighborhood strife between the settled working class and a growing populace of Puerto Ricans inspired Leonard Bernstein (composer), Stephen Sondheim (lyricist) and Arthur Laurents (playwright) to tell an operatic story of young love destroyed by group hostilities.

Leading the troupe will be seniors Christine Deluca as Maria, Abraham Hiatt as Tony and Matt Capodicasa as Riff. Brian Glassett will appear as Bernardo and Sarah Marable as Anita.

Ms. Wellman, a Scotch Plains native and career teacher in the local district's music department, began as director and producer in 1996

Jim Parsons Flourishes In Television Journalism

By JOSH HAMERMAN
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD — While growing up in his family's Columbus Avenue home, television reporter Jim Parsons always looked forward to 7 p.m., when he and his father would tune in to watch Walter Cronkite anchor the CBS Evening News.

The program allowed young Jim to spend quality time with his busy dad, who worked long hours as a letter carrier for the Westfield Post Office and held a second job at Bernie's Liquor Store.

"It was tough for me to spend a lot of time with my father, but I could always watch Walter Cronkite with him and when the news was over at 7:30, I could talk with him about what happened in the world that day," Mr. Parsons told *The Westfield Leader* and *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*.

"The news gave me time to bond with my father for the evening," he said.

Mr. Parsons later entered Cronkite's field; his career achievements include four Emmys and an Edward R. Murrow Award, as well as interviews with Bill and Hillary Clinton, Al Gore, Dan Quayle, Gerald Ford, and Jimmy Carter.

Since 1998, he has been a familiar face to Pittsburgh residents as an investigative reporter at WTAE, the city's ABC affiliate station. Prior to settling in Pittsburgh, Mr. Parsons reported stories for stations in Indianapolis, Buffalo, and Rochester, N.Y.

"I really love my profession," he said. "It gets a bad rap sometimes, but all in all it's a great job."

However, when Mr. Parsons graduated from Westfield High School (WHS) in 1977, his sights were set on a career in radio. He hoped to follow in the footsteps of the disc jockeys at WNEW (102.7 FM).

"Anybody who remembers WNEW from the 60s and 70s knows it was one of the great rock stations in the history of this country," he said. "I found the DJs to be very fascinating people with great voices, and I wanted to be just like them."

In addition to his admiration for WNEW's deejays and his fond memories of watching the CBS Evening News, Mr. Parsons' teachers at WHS also inspired him to become a broadcaster.

"I had some really good high school teachers who made me interested in history and literature, and made me want to

crack open books and read," he said. "News goes on everywhere, and those teachers opened my eyes to the world outside of Westfield, New Jersey."

After high school, Mr. Parsons (the fifth of six children) ventured to the University of Dayton to study broadcasting and pursue his dream. His Garden State roots, however, proved to be a minor obstacle. Before he graduated in 1981, he was required to take speech classes to drop his New Jersey accent.

"You can't say caffee when you're on TV in Indianapolis," he noted.

Mr. Parsons toiled at radio stations in Rochester and Cortland, N.Y. after graduation, but in 1985, he made the switch from radio to TV when he became a general assignment reporter and weekend anchor at Rochester's NBC affiliate.

Chris Glorioso, who worked as a reporter for the WB-11 News At 10 on WPIX, worked at WTAE from 2001 to 2004, said of Mr. Parsons, "The 'P' in Parsons stands for persistence. There are a number of times where I know Jim has a story that he's itching to do, but he waits until it's ripe. Even if he has a slam-bang headline, he'll wait a year until he feels a story is complete and ready to go."

"The importance of ratings can sometimes pollute good work in TV journalism, but Jim is a good role model because he spends hours and hours making sure he treats people fairly," Mr. Glorioso continued. "As a result, I think even the people he does critical stories about respect him. That's his strength, and that's why he's perhaps a rarity in the world of investigative journalism."

In January, Mr. Parsons returned to Westfield for the first time since the late 1980s, when his parents moved to Toms River. While in New Jersey to visit his siblings and parents and attend the New York Giants' final season game, he gave his two daughters (he and his wife also have a 17-year-old son) a tour of his old stomping ground. The girls saw where their father went to school and the house where he grew up, as well as the downtown area.

Mr. Parsons enjoyed that experience, but he regrets being unable to come to Westfield last year, when members of the WHS Classes of 1976 and 1977 held an informal reunion at the Jolly Trolley.

"I had a lot of friends from Westfield who I lost touch with, and I would have loved to see them again," he said.



Photo Courtesy of ThePittsburghChannel.com
Jim Parsons



Photo Courtesy of John Rango

ECHOFISSION'S FUSION... Scotch Plains native John Rango, left, and Gebhardt "Geb" Zurburg will join other members of their band, Echofission, at a fundraiser for tsunami victims at The Crossroads in Garwood on Saturday, March 12. They will take the stage around 10 p.m.

Echofission to Perform At Tsunami Fundraiser

By MICHELLE HELEN Le POIDEVIN
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — Scotch Plains native John Rango recently announced that his band, Echofission, would be taking the stage at The Crossroads in Garwood on Saturday, March 12, for a fundraiser to aid victims of the December 26, 2004 tsunami.

The New Jersey-based band will begin performing at 10 p.m., although the doors open at 6 p.m. Some of the proceeds from "Sounds For Tsunami Relief" will be donated to the International Response Fund of the American Red Cross.

Mr. Rango, who asked the band "Souls

Release" and solo acoustic performer Brian Fitzpatrick to join in the evening's festivities, said that 250 tickets have been printed for the event, with a little over half being sold by February 10. He anticipates a sold-out performance.

Mr. Rango, who attended Terrill Middle School in Scotch Plains, established Echofission in 2001 with another guitar player and drummer in the band. After playing a few shows and writing songs over the past few years, the group has quite a broad fan-base, he noted.

Primarily, the band performs at The Crossroads, but also counts The Lion's

Continued on Page 23



SYMPHONY LESSON... Recently, students at Wilson Elementary School in Westfield were treated to a musical performance by the Westfield High School Symphony Orchestra. Approximately 70 members of the orchestra participated in this musical program for the elementary schools in Westfield. The high school performers introduced the children to the various sections of the orchestra and their instruments. The highlight of the program was the playing of the selected scores from *The Lion King*.

☆☆☆ LOCAL STARS ☆☆☆

Lauren Shub of Westfield Performed at Arts Center

WESTFIELD —

Lauren Shub of Westfield performed her cabaret act "Isn't it Romantic?" on February 26 with the Hal Hirsch Trio at the Watchung Arts Center. The program was a celebration of the greatest composers and lyricists of the 20th century, from Irving Berlin and Duke Ellington to James Van Heusen.

Ms. Shub is a professional singer and actor, who has performed on Broadway in regional theatres such as the McCarter in Princeton, as well as in films, commercials and industrial shows.

A graduate of New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, on Broadway, she originated the role of Mary Moley in *The Utter Glory of Morrissey Hall* starring Celeste Holm. In regional theatre, she played daughter Schprintze to Theodore Bikel's Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*. As a youngster in her first professional acting role, she played Bet to Ray Walston's Fagin in *Oliver*.

This past spring, Ms. Shub played Leah in *Two by Two*, which was presented in Westfield.



Photo Courtesy of www.laurenshub.com

DOWNTOWN PERFORMANCE... Lauren Shub, right, joined by guitarist Hal Hirsch and bassist Bob Funesti, performed in downtown Westfield on Central Avenue during the Westfield Art Association's 'Art in Westfield' Sidewalk Show and Sale in the spring of 2003.

As a vocalist, she has sung with the Hal Hirsch Trio, Alfred Patterson Trio, Framework Quartet and many other respected jazz musicians. She appears regularly at the Westfield Art Association's downtown exhibitions.

This past summer, she performed in the East Brunswick summer concert series. She has also sung the jingles for Prudential, Snickers and others. For more information, please visit www.laurenshub.com.



LOCAL ACTORS... David Neal of Fanwood, left, plays Wayne and Maureen Bentley of Westfield, right, plays Betty in the Summit Playhouse's current production of *Inspecting Carol*.



A Special Program Honoring CARTER BREY

ANI KAVAFIAN *violin* WENDY CHEN *piano*

Chopin Sonata for Cello & Piano
Bach Suite for Solo Cello
Mendelssohn Trio in C minor

SUNDAY, MARCH 13, 2005

MAPLEWOOD at 3:00 P.M. WESTFIELD at 7:30 P.M.
Morrow Methodist Church, 600 Ridgewood Rd. Temple Emanu-El, 756 East Broad St.

Tickets (honored at both locations): \$25, Seniors \$22

WESTFIELD ONLY: All students 10-21 are welcome to attend Mostly Music concerts for a nominal charge of \$1.00. We want to encourage young people to experience live classical music performances. Students under the age of 15 must be accompanied by an adult.

Tickets available at the door

CALL US AT 973-762-0108

For best handicapped access, please attend in Westfield on Sunday evening

Program subject to change



Get Outta The House

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

Union County College's Theater Project is joining in New Jersey Theatre Alliance's Eighth Annual Family Week at the Theatre with two presentations of *Animal Babble*. Children ages four to nine will see what happens when a Spanish-speaking lion needs the help of a French crocodile and a monkey from The Bronx in this interactive, multilingual reading and language-enrichment theater event. It will take place on Saturday, March 5, at 11 a.m., at the Elizabeth campus of Union County College, 12 West Jersey Street, and on Sunday, March 6, at 1 p.m. at the Cranford campus, 1033 Springfield Avenue. Admission is free.

Also at Union County College's Cranford campus, there is still time to see the large-scale, semi-abstract wall mounted works of *Tim Murphy at the Tomasulo Gallery*, through Thursday, March 17. Admission is free, but call (908) 709-1155 for times.

Mozart's *Così Fan Tutte*, a comedy performed in English, at The Presbyterian Church of Westfield on March 5 at 8 p.m. and March 6 at 3 p.m. This semi-staged and costumed production is by the Little Opera Company of New Jersey, conducted by Robert Butts. Admission is \$25 to \$30. For information, please call (908) 789-9696, or log onto www.njworkshopforthearts.com.

Now through mid-April, the annual *New Jersey Film Festival* is at Rutgers University, on the New Brunswick campus. There is a complete schedule available at www.njfilmfest.com, or call (732) 932-8482 for information on screenings and workshops. Some highlights of this year's festival include: *The Wizard of Oz*, *Vera Drake*, *Tarnation*, *Man With a Movie Camera*, and *The Motorcycle Diaries*.

The Internet Lounge, 256 South Avenue, Fanwood, will host an *Open Mic/Karaoke Night* on March 6 at 7 p.m. Participate in an original poetry reading, a stand-up comedy routine or a musical number, while enjoying gourmet coffee and a variety of organic treats. If you prefer, surf the web or play a game of *Diablo2*, *Neverwinter Nights*, *WarCraft* or *Counter-Strike*. There's no cover charge. To see a complete schedule, call (908) 490-1234 or visit <http://www.theinternetlounge.com/>.