

## TAKE THE STAGE

## 'Planet' Sparkles With Hope for Tomorrow



By SUSAN M. DOUGHERTY  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

CRANFORD — Way before "American Idol" superstars were born, fans of early TV shows like "Lassie" and "Howdy Doody" developed a great fan base.

"Music from a Sparkling Planet" by Douglas Carter Beane is not a musical, nor is it from another planet. It is a pretty far-out comedy with tragic undercurrents, which explores the idolization of a TV star from the 1970s.

The Professional Theater Company at Union County College in Cranford, The Theater Project, never disappoints. Their latest offering is no exception. The two-act comedy is an odyssey in time for three 40-something male friends who explore the question of what ever became of that superstar hero they adored as kids. The friends actually escape their everyday lives and responsibilities to track down 1970s TV kid show host Tamara Tomorrow, whose hopeful prognostications provided the lead in to space age cartoon figures.

Along their journey, these beer guzzling, trivial pursuit loving men give the audience a glimpse into their futile lives and the life of the star herself.

Why was she the love of these three boys lives?

They realize it was her optimism, her vision of the future and her hope for a better world that made her unforgettable.

When the protagonists were growing up, the real threat of Cold War communism laced with the threat of nuclear bombing loomed all too near. Seemingly, Ms. Tomorrow's predictions and optimism provided a stabilizing safety net.

Sitting in the director's chair for this roller coaster adventure is Wendy Liscow, who was associated with the George Street Playhouse in New Brunswick, and the New Jersey Theater Alliance in Morristown, and now with the Morristown-based Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation. Ms. Liscow's directorial eye for detail has paid off big time in this small production with her use of five actors' strengths and stimulating staging.

The stage itself, designed by Jessica Parks, is cleverly done. A functional, visually pleasing archway suggests an enlarged TV screen with a border of individual frames of cartoons from the TV show.

The scrim doubles as a filmy curtain between scenes or, when lit directly from overhead, literally spotlights Miss Tomorrow complete in her outlandish headpiece and sparkling silver lamé costume designed by Cherie Cunningham.

Liz Zazzi has the fun of playing zany-but-life-enhancing superstar Tamara Tomorrow. As the actress portraying the star, she is sensitive and vulnerable in accepting the reality of her relationship with the show's producer Andy.

Scenes with her involvement with Andy show the depth of her hurt and humiliation in losing her heart to a married man.

Gary Glor delivers a rock-solid performance as Andy, the producer, who finally learns to notice things about Tamara. A gifted actor, Mr. Glor demonstrates that he can play any role convincingly.

The three adventurers, Wags, played by Clark Carmichael, Miller, played by Jesse Jou, and Hoagie, played by Jeff Maschi have a credible buddy bond.

Their comic timing, like a well-tuned 1970s Chevy Impala, purrs along as they banter and cavort. They test each other's memory with TV trivia and all confess that Tamara Tomorrow was not only their first love, but also their first sexual fantasy.

Interspersed with beers and trivia, the guys wax philosophical while they analyze why they are running from people and things in their lives.

When they finally find their heroine, Hoagie, the less educated of the three men, explains to her: "When I was a kid, I was fearless, I was sure of myself, girls wanted me for their boyfriend. Now I'm fearful."

"When I think of those fearless times, you were there," Hoagie tells his idol.

If we all look back far enough and deep enough into our collective memories, we will see the childhood heroes from TV or in real life that helped us shape impossible dreams.

Artistic Director Mark Spina steps on The Theater Project's small stage nightly to give a wise pitch: "Tell your friends and neighbors to turn off their TV sets and come to see ours."

Take his advice. The show runs at 8 p.m. Thursday through Saturday nights with Sunday matinees every weekend through Sunday, October 9.



BLOWN TO SMITHEREENS...The Smithereens perform at Music Fest '05 on September 17 at Echo Lake Park on the border of Mountainside and Westfield.

## Music Fest '05 Rocks Echo Lake Park in Mountainside

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

MOUNTAINSIDE — As the late afternoon turned to dusk, the influx of attendees of Kids Kingdom/Music Fest '05, a presentation of the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders at Echo Lake Park in Mountainside, evolved from families with kids in tow to rock n' rollers of all ages, some with kids still in tow, who were there to see the free performance of several headline groups, including They Might Be Giants (TMBG), The Smithereens, and Joan Jett & The Blackhearts.

Before the better-known rockers took the stage, New Jersey-based quartet Spiraling played a 45-minute set, and, evidently, there were fans who attended specifically to see them play. Included in that group were Bill Brislin from Mahwah, and his friend Kyle. Bill's brother, Tom, is the keyboard player/singer/songwriter for Spiraling. According to Mr. Brislin, "They have an ongoing relationship with They Might Be Giants." Tom later told *The Westfield Leader* and *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*, "Our connection with TMBG began in the late '90s. Our band had opened for them at a few shows in the New Jersey area. In the years since, we've toured with TMBG nationwide."

Following Spiraling, Scotch Plains resident Pat DiNizio and his band, The Smithereens, belted out at least

nine tunes, including some greatest hits like "Behind the Wall of Sleep," "A Girl Like You" and "Blood and Roses." These guys sounded just as fresh as they did in the 80's, and their performance was of studio-quality. If you missed the show, your next chance to catch them locally is at B.B. King's Blues Club in New York City on Saturday, January 21, 2006.

They Might Be Giants were next, and played to a crowd whose numbers were increasing, presumably because they were fans of the final act, Joan Jett & The Blackhearts, like college students Shannon and Melissa from Hudson County, and Cosmo, who schlepped his wife and their two children, along with one of their friends, from Orange County New York to see his power punkster play.

John Linnell and John Flansburgh seized the moment, or perhaps it was planned, to entertain the many children who were there with their aging rocker parents, with their new line of songs and entertainment, featured on a new interactive website: www.giantskid.net and the concurrent release of their new CD, *Here Come the ABC's*. Could it be that one of these guys recently became a dad? The band played through a downpour, which was when most concertgoers without umbrellas, including this writer, departed. That was too bad, because, like Joan, "I Love Rock n' Roll."



## POPCORN™

## An Unfinished Life: Fulfilling Nonetheless

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

By MICHAEL S. GOLDBERGER  
2 & 1/2 popcorns

Starring Robert Redford, Jennifer Lopez, Morgan Freeman and Becca Gardner in a sweetly arranged spray of just what it means to make and keep human connections, it is admittedly faulty. While well intentioned, the bucolically-set soap opera inveigles its way into your heart without necessarily presenting the correct dramatic credentials. But the sudsy scoop of endearing notions isn't out-and-out schlock either. And there's the rub.

It begins back in Iowa. Having fallen on tough times, single mom Jean has just taken the last beating she's about to take from good-for-nothing Gary Watson (Damian Lewis), the latest in a string of unsuccessful romances. Untrusting of the inadequate procedures and facilities available to battered women in her little burg, she decides to head for higher ground, literally and figuratively. She winds up on Einar's Wyoming doorstep, daughter Griff (Becca Gardner) in tow. No warm welcome awaits.

Mr. Redford, who has made an art of portraying the perennial pioneer in a world that has all but turned its back on self-determination, is splendid as the frosty host. He's a good actor, and the curmudgeon he exerts poses an interesting challenge for him. Yet the inner and outer glow that is Redford won't be denied, and you'll see how that works to the story's advantage.

That the movie star is perhaps the best looking 68-year-old the silver screen has ever known also has its benefit. His gently aging visage against the stunning Western backdrop is a natural fit, evoking a mural Remington might have painted. You could put it on a postage stamp or a lunch box.

Adding another intrigue to the pro-

ceedings whilst also doing what he does best, Morgan Freeman plays Mitch Bradley. Recalling Red in *Shawshank Redemption* (1994) and Eddie "Scrap Iron" Dupris in the more recent *Million Dollar Baby* (2004), he is again the conscience of the tale.

He announces his philosophies from a porch just across the yard. We're not exactly sure what his relationship to Redford's character is, and whether he's ill or injured. But we do observe that Mitch receives more personal ministrations from Einar than the latter's character profile would seem to warrant.

This is where young Miss Gardner comes into play. Effective and reasonably enamoring, Griff's funny when she inquires as to the basis of Einar and Mitch's camaraderie. She's also the chief catalyst.

Problem is, there's a double-edged sword at work here. It's all pretty predictable...or at least it better be. The audience builds a vested interest in Mr. Hallstrom's likeable characters. If things don't turn out the way we expect they should, there's going to be an awful lot of unhappy campers exiting the Bijou.

It boils down to this: What would you rather? To be perceived as tough-minded, strict in your tastes and nobody's fool when it comes to your film choices, or just happy? Ah, don't worry. If you choose the latter and see "An Unfinished Life," it stays right there.

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*An Unfinished Life*, rated PG-13, is a Miramax Films release directed by Lasse Hallstrom and stars Robert Redford, Jennifer Lopez and Morgan Freeman. Running time: 107 minutes.



TAMARA TOMORROW...Clark Carmichael and Jeff Maschi let Jesse Jou drive in their journey to find the love of their boyhood dreams, Tamara Tomorrow, host of a 1970's space cartoon show. The Theater Project's poignant comedy, "Music from a Sparkling Planet," runs Thursday through Saturdays at 8 p.m. and Sunday matinees at 2 p.m. until October 9. The professional theater company is located at Union County College's auditorium in Cranford.

## Steven Snow to Perform in Opera's Der Freischütz

WESTFIELD — The Little Opera Company of New Jersey, a division of the New Jersey Workshop for the Arts in Westfield, has announced that renowned tenor Steven Snow was cast in the starring role of Max in the LOC's production of Carl von Weber's *Der Freischütz*.

According to Valerie Pineda, president of the LOC, "Steven Snow was selected to portray this role because of his wealth of performance experience. He is well liked by critics and the audience alike. We are thrilled to have him debut this role of Max with the Little Opera Company."

Mr. Snow's background includes touring the United States and Canada in the role of Juan Perón in *Evita* and as Giuseppe in David Bell's production of *Phantom*. The tenor performed with many regional opera companies, including the Lyric Opera of San Antonio, Opera Delaware, Des Moines Metro Opera, the Natchez Opera Festival and the Maine Grand Opera.

In *Der Freischütz*, also referred to as *The Devil's Magic Bullet*, Mr. Snow will portray the role of Max, a forester, whose shooting ability has diminished. This concern about his lack of skill leads him to enter an arrangement with the deceitful Kaspar, who tells him that he possesses a magic bullet that can hit a shooter's desired target. Max succumbs to Kaspar's plot because he knows that the winner of the contest will become the head ranger and will win the hand of the maiden Agathe in marriage.

The LOC production, which is fully staged and performed in English, will be presented on Saturday, October 15, at 2 and 8 p.m., at the Roy

Smith Theater at Union County College, located on Springfield Avenue in Cranford. Tickets are priced at \$25 for adults, \$20 for seniors and \$15 for students. Special family rates are also available.

For more information on *Der Freischütz*, visit the NJWA office at 150-152 East Broad Street, Westfield, or call (908) 789-9696. Additional information on all NJWA programs is available on the web at www.njworkshopforthearts.com.



THE ONE TENOR...Tenor Steven Snow will debut his role as Max in the Little Opera Company of New Jersey's production of *Der Freischütz*.

## UCC Hosts Seminars On Import Regulations

CRANFORD — Union County College will host a two-day seminar about "Basic Import Regulations and Operations" from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Saturdays, October 15 and 22. The cost is \$295. To register or for more information, call (908) 709-7601.

The Little Opera Company  
...a division of the New Jersey Workshop for the Arts  
presents  
WEBER's  
**DER FREISCHÜTZ**  
The Devil's Magic Bullet  
Fully Staged in English  
2 PM & 8 PM Sat. October 15, 2005  
Roy Smith Theater  
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For Tickets Call:  
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Conducted by Robert W. Butts  
Starring:  
Steven Snow, Max  
Kevin Pruner, Caspar  
Holly Fanning, Agnes  
Maureen Monroe, Annschen  
Ted Dougherty, Cuno  
Charles Schneider, Ottokar  
Don Sheasley, Hermit

## Jason Kidd

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 22

Kidd and Angelique arrived at Tamaques School shortly after 9 a.m. (slightly late) to hundreds of shrieking children plastered to their classroom windows. The two proceeded inside where they were met by tens of classmates, Principal Mike Cullen and First Grade Teacher Anne Marie Petriano.

Kidd and the Nets provided four preseason tickets of choice to Tamaques students, along with complimentary t-shirts. Principal Cullen said in his six years as principal, "this is the biggest day I've ever seen."

"It's truly a great thing, a life moment," he said.

Kidd said chidingly that his presence puts the pressure on the school to live up to this day. "We set a trend," he said. Vice President of Business and Public Relations for the Nets Barry Baum told *The Leader* that the team is committed to providing unlimited access to the fans.

"And you can't have more access than a six year old getting to take Jason Kidd to school. Have you ever heard of a team doing anything like this?" he said.



ALL'S FAIR...Family fun and games will be the order of the day during the Wardlaw-Hartridge School's Fall Fair on Saturday, October 22. The day begins at 9 a.m. with coffee and pastries at the Edison independent school that serves Pre-K through grade 12 students.

## Wardlaw-Hartridge School Announces Family Fall Fair

AREA — Family fun and games will be the order of the day during the Wardlaw-Hartridge School's Fall Fair on Saturday, October 22. The day begins at 9 a.m. with coffee and pastries at the Edison independent school that serves Pre-K through grade 12 students.

Children of all ages are invited to participate in the games in Laidlaw Gymnasium, or for children who prefer to do craft projects; tables will be set for them to work with beads and other projects.

The free day-long event, open to the public as well as the school community, hosts 30 or more vendors for a boutique-quality shopping spree in the independent school's all-purpose room.

Parent committee chairs announced that vendors would send unique handbags, jewelry, candy, sports clothing, hand carved figures, stationery and many other specialty items.

The school's middle and upper school clubs will host booths outdoors featuring sand art, hair braiding and other activities. The Parents' Association provides a bakery booth with home baked goods where parents sell their favorite desserts and breads.

Also, a catered, sit down luncheon is offered for a set fee, and hot dogs and sausage sandwiches are for sale for those who prefer to eat while watching the sporting events.

## Westfield Symphony Opens 2005-06 Season

The Westfield Symphony Orchestra (WSO) opens its 2005-2006 season with the inaugural Joseph DeAlessandro Memorial Opera Concert, an opera-in-concert performance of Bizet masterpiece "Carmen" on Saturday October 1 at 8 p.m. at the Presbyterian Church in Westfield.

The Westfield Symphony Orchestra, singers of the New York City Opera and Princeton Pro Musica come together in a collaborative residency, affecting the cultural community of central New Jersey, and creating one of the more high-profile Arts events in New Jersey's 2005-06 state calendar.

Concert tickets are \$25 to \$60 with discounts for students and senior citizens. Tickets may be purchased directly from the WSO at (908) 232-9400; or at one of the following WSO ticket outlets: Lancaster, Ltd. (76 Elm Street, Westfield); Town Book Store (255 East Broad Street, Westfield); Martin Jewelers (12 North Avenue West, Cranford); Beautiful Things (1878 East Second Street, Scotch Plains).

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