

## POPCORN™ Dreamgirls You Can't Hurry Art

One Popcorn, Poor • Two Popcorns, Fair • Three Popcorns, Good • Four Popcorns, Excellent  
By MICHAEL S. GOLDBERGER  
3 popcorns

Somewhere in America, maybe this week, perhaps next, a little girl will experience Jennifer Hudson singing "And I Am Telling You I'm Not Going," the signature torch song in *Dreamgirls*. Juilliard might as well send her the application now. The die is cast. A star will be born.

It's that kind of performance. Playing Effie White, the almost homely, practically dowdy member of the title trio, she has just been jilted.

Vibrating every timber in the theater, bringing the house down in that unmistakable blend of music and heartrending catharsis, she invokes the pain and suffering of every gal who ever fell for the wrong guy. You almost feel guilty if you're of the offending gender.

Overwhelming as it is entertaining, and maybe even more so, the exactness of the number is a microcosm of the film's shortcoming. While enjoyable for its music, book and an overall feeling of vibrancy, *Dreamgirls* is more precise than original. Its 's are crossed, its 's dotted. There are no surprises.

But even if a solid iteration of a stereotype, the colorful cliché is nonetheless done with stunning flourish. Director/screenwriter Bill Condon, working from the Broadway show's script and lyrics penned by Tom Eyrn, engraves a virtual template for the genre. Following his lead, practically every principal etches a meticulous characterization.

Though it should be no surprise considering the drama that he has woven into several of his comedic portrayals, Eddie Murphy taps his Pagliacci and contributes the film's most creative depiction. He is James "Thunder" Early, an R&B singer who won't compromise his style in order to appeal to a larger audience (read white).

Jimmy's the ignition, a rambunctious, hard-living entertainer with one foot in the old school, one on the precipice of inventing the new. And one night, when his had-it-up-to-here backup singers skeddaddle, the enterprising Curtis Taylor, Jr. (Jamie Foxx) spots his opportunity. All that the three ingénues waiting in the wings need is his managing genius, even if they don't know it.

Effie, then lead singer, is against it. Backup is a dead end. Which is what prompts Mr. Taylor to ply his Svengali-like ways. The glorious tumult is set in motion.

Fast forward, they're one big happy family, so to speak, crisscrossing the country by bus. The expected romances germinate, talent is honed, strategies are executed, and before long no one is very sure just what the initial plan was in the first place.

## NJWA Concert Band To Perform in January

WESTFIELD - Under the direction of Howard Toplansky, the New Jersey Workshop for the Arts (NJWA) Concert Band will perform on Sunday, January 14, at 2 p.m. at the David Brearley High School located at 401 Monroe Avenue in Kenilworth.

Tickets for the two-hour concert are \$5 per person and the public is cordially invited. Donations are also accepted and will go to assist the Brearley Music Boosters. In addition, the members of the Brearley High School Band, under the direction of band director John Ondrey, will perform several selections with

### Theater Project Presents Readings

CRANFORD - The Theater Project, Union County College's Professional Theater Company, will present a staged reading series of original plays by members of The Theater Project's Playwrights Development Workshop, led by Artistic Director Mark Spina.

These script-in-hand performances offer the excitement and immediacy of actually sitting in on rehearsals with the members of The Theater Project.

The presentation will be followed by a discussion with the playwright, director, actors and audience, in the Union County College Student Commons, located at 1033 Springfield Avenue in Cranford. Admission is free.



CELEBRITY STATUS QUO...Candace Wicke rehearses the chorus for the upcoming Washington Elementary School show. Performances of *Stick to the Status Quo* are January 26 and 27. The Westfield production, now in its 59th year, is the school's biggest fundraiser. It is written, directed, produced and performed entirely by Washington School parents, including Ms. Wicke, the conductor-in-residence at Carnegie Hall for MidAmerica Productions. To order tickets or get more information, visit [westfieldnj12.org/washington](http://westfieldnj12.org/washington).

Only one thing is certain. The Dreams are headed for stardom. And feelings are going to be hurt in the process.

Pushing the plot toward its first big complication is Curtis's decision to make Deena Jones (Beyonce Knowles) the lead. She's the real pretty one. By his calculation, the move will help catapult the girls over to the pop charts. That's where the genuine fame resides.

Effie bristles. She's the better singer. But what really adds insult to injury is when Mr. Taylor also switches romantic allegiance to his new diva. Such is his management style. It is at this point that Miss Hudson regales us with the aforementioned barnburner.

Shades of Billie Holiday, the vanquishing hyperbole isn't the sort of thing you'd want to hear over and over. But Effie makes her point. The group goes through yet another transition.

It would be a faux pas to give away too much more of the plot, though fans of popular culture probably know the old saw anyway. Hardly veiled since the original show opened in December 1981, it is generally acknowledged that the musical chronicles the joys and sorrows of Diana Ross and the Supremes. While making for good press, it is only partially accurate.

More correctly, *Dreamgirls* is an amalgam of several stories, mixed, re-mixed and arranged for Broadway consumption, right down to the transmutation of the music. It has that sound, matinee on Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday. You can practically taste the orange drink.

Of course, it's all a matter of taste. However, while some of the tunes have since gained recognition in their own right, few can compare to the actual girl group hits of the era. These are more like essence of Motown.

Where Mr. Condon's movie version distinguishes itself is in its production values, from seamless segues to time appropriate appurtenances. And while successfully singing a paean to the source material, it is nevertheless cinematic. Nary a board creaks.

What's missing is an edginess. For all the film's perfect execution, we find ourselves wishing for some ragtag nuances to challenge the imagination. Oxymoron notwithstanding, *Dreamgirls* could benefit from a novel *flaw* or two.

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*Dreamgirls*, rated PG-13, is a DreamWorks Distribution LLC release directed by Bill Condon and stars Beyonce Knowles, Jennifer Hudson and Jamie Foxx. Running time: 131 minutes

the NJWA Concert Band.

This concert will feature a bassoon piece by Czech composer Julius Ernst Wilhelm Fucik, who spent most of his life as the leader of military brass bands. Sometimes known as the Bohemian Sousa, he was a prolific composer, with more than 300 marches, polkas and waltzes to his name.

The NJWA Concert Band will also introduce its American audience to Matvey Blanter's "John Grey" foxtrot at the upcoming concert. Blanter, born in February 1903 into a family of poor Jewish artisans in the Ukraine, was one of the most important composers of popular and film music in Russia.

Mazurkas, waltzes, marches and ragtime will also be performed at the concert. "Air for Band" by Frank Erickson and "Higher and Higher" by Julius Khait promise to excite the audience. Elliot Del Borgo's "Fire Dance" will add a harmonic and rhythmic beat, while George Gershwin's "Oh, Lady Be Good" will have audience members humming to this classic.

NJWA, now in its 12th year, is already working on upcoming concerts. On February 24, it is scheduled to play a fundraiser at the Union County College for the benefit of the Union County College Foundation.

For further information about the concert, or if interested in becoming a member of this group of performers, call (908) 964-1793 or e-mail [njwaband@att.net](mailto:njwaband@att.net).



Susan M. Dougherty for The Westfield Leader and The Times  
CRAZY FOR YOU...In the Westfield Community Players' opening night of *Angel Street*, real life husband and wife Mark and Syndi Szabo play Jack and Bella Manningham with chilling realism. The Victorian 1880 setting translates well for 2007 in questioning whether a husband and wife really know each other.

## Comm. Players Continue With Thriller *Angel Street*

WESTFIELD - Patrick Hamilton's Victorian thriller *Angel Street* continues Friday and Saturday evenings January 12, 13, 19 and 20 in the theater at 1000 North Avenue West in Westfield. First produced in London, this play was the basis for the film *Gaslight*.

For the Mannings who live on *Angel Street* in London, all appears peaceful and serene from the outside. Within, Mr. Manningham is slowly torturing his wife into insanity under the guise of kindness. It takes the tenacious inspector Rough from Scotland Yard to help Mrs. Manningham as he investigates a murder committed 15 years ago in the house on *Angel Street*.

Real-life spouses Mark and Syndi Szabo of Parlin play the Mannings while Lee Wittenberg is Inspector Rough of Scotland Yard who commands Michael Bieber (Westfield) and Brian Riccobono.

The household is completed with maids Jackie Weiner of Westfield and Valerie Van Hossier of Cranford. Produced by Kay Macrae of Westfield.

Lynn Lampariello is the stage manager, Bill McMeek of Scotch Plains was construction manager and Bob Murray is technical director.

Call the box office at (908) 232-1221 for reserved seating at \$15 per ticket. Non-members must prepay tickets with reservations. Note that on the benefit performance of January 12, Westfield Community Players' membership cards will not be honored. On those nights, tickets are available from the sponsoring organizations.

### Angel Street

Spectacular costumes by WCPs President Naomi Yablonsky and Betty Hetherington are wonderfully authentic (except for Ms. Szabo's contemporary French manicured snow-white tipped gel nails).

The sold out opening night only indicates that WCP has been doing something right since its inception in 1934.

## Visual Arts Center Hosts Young at ART

SUMMIT - *Young at ART*, a new exhibition, is on display the month of January at the Visual Arts Center of New Jersey, located at 68 Elm Street in Summit. The group show, which will run through January 31, represents the work of the art center's junior students.

The exhibition includes work from students in the art center's summer programs, outreach programs (students in programs outside the art center) and Kaleidoscope Program (students who visit the main gallery exhibitions and do a project related to the exhibition.) The work is on view in the strolling galleries on the first and second floors of the center.

This first-ever exhibit encompasses various media, including drawing, painting, sculpture, photography, assemblage and more. The pieces are displayed with the students' names and the instructor of the class in which the work was produced.

The show was assembled with the help of a large committee from the art center, including members of the board, staff and volunteers. Committee members include Lynn Celler, Mari D'Alessandro, Jessica Haverstick, Winifred McNeill, Dannielle Mick, Rasika Reddy, Carletta Schneider and Amy Shaffer, all under the chairperson Bonnie

## Artist Falotico Exhibits Constructing Heads

SCOTCH PLAINS - Local artist Frank Falotico will demonstrate drawing heads and portraits at the Scotch Plains & Fanwood Arts Association meeting on Thursday, January 18, at 7 p.m. in the Scotch Plains Library at 1927 Bartle Avenue.

Relying on his extensive background in anatomy, Mr. Falotico will show us how to construct faces on top of the underlying structure of the human head.

He has been the director of the DuCret School of Art in Plainfield since 1985. He has taught anatomy for more than 30 years and also teaches life drawing, painting and sculpture. He has a bachelor of arts degree from

Jaffe.

For additional information on this exhibit, contact Ms. D'Alessandro, exhibitions manager, at (908) 273-9121 or via e-mail at [mari@artcenternj.org](mailto:mari@artcenternj.org). For more information on the Visual Arts Center of New Jersey, visit [artcenternj.org](http://artcenternj.org).

### NJWA Chooses Piano Music Dealer

WESTFIELD - Ted Schlosberg, founder and executive director of the New Jersey Workshop for the Arts (NJWA) Music Studio, has announced that the Freehold Music Center has been chosen as a designated piano music dealer for NJWA piano purchasing and servicing.

The Music Studio has recently replaced its old pianos with Yamaha uprights. Mike Diehl, owner of Freehold Music Center, said, "The value, longevity and reliable performance over time are a few of the reasons we recommend Yamaha pianos for schools and institutions."

For a complete brochure on the Music Studio offerings, or information on any program of the NJWA, visit their studios at 150-152 East Broad Street in Westfield or call (908) 789-9696. Additional information can be found on the web at [njworkshopforthearts.com](http://njworkshopforthearts.com).

## Les Malamut Gallery Shows 'Enthusiasm'

AREA - The Les Malamut Art Gallery announced an exhibit of pastel art work by the Shared Enthusiasm Group.

The show will open with a "Meet the Artists" reception on Saturday, January 20, in the gallery from 2 to 4 p.m. The public is invited to attend.

The artists exhibiting are Althea Howlett Scheller, Anita McKenna-Murphy, Barbara Uhr and Diane Gallo. All are members of the Visual Arts Center of New Jersey, as well as several other art associations.

Their work has been shown in numerous venues in New Jersey. Artist Dannielle Mick, who has an enthusiastic approach in exploring color, light and composition, founded the Shared Enthusiasm Group. They meet regu-

larly to share ideas and techniques.

Ms. Scheller feels that watercolor and pastel impressionist paintings bring her the most pleasure. Ms. Murphy's work is profound and meditative in its representation of the natural world. Ms. Uhr said drawing and painting are the best ways to see and enjoy the wonders of nature, while Ms. Gallo maintains that to work with one's hands to produce something that speaks to one is a joyous thing.

The Les Malamut Art Gallery is located in the Union Public Library, located at 1800 Morris Avenue in Union. It is open during regular library hours and is handicapped accessible. For further information, call (908) 851-5450.

## Vic's Picks Lacuna Coil Twists Up Metal World

By VICTORIA McCABE  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Italian goth-rock sextet Lacuna Coil have done something special. The Milan-based group's April 2006 release "Karmacode" bridges a gap between goth metal and mainstream hardrock, channeling all the unbridled energy of the former into a wildly exciting version of the latter.

On "Karmacode," Lacuna Coil is like Evanescence with a real kick; the music is melodic and accessible, but it doesn't sacrifice its heavier instrumental edge. The album is a pure adrenaline rush from start to finish, and it's hard not to get swept up in the music.

The fantasy that litters goth lyrics doesn't show up; Lacuna Coil serves reality, weaving the kinds of stories and baring the emotions all rock listeners recognize.

And the vocals are the first instantly attractive thing here. Cristina Scabbia's ethereal voice mesmerizes, grounded by the male contributions of backup singer Andrea Ferro. Scabbia carries each melody fluidly over the intense guitar/bass fabric her bandmates lay down, giving the mu-

sic a unique optimism. "Karmacode" has plenty of highlights. From its very opening guitar riff, "To the Edge" is invigorating. It's a dark arena rocker with a killer hook, the best cut on the album. "Life will be ready to twist up your world," Scabbia and Ferro sing.

"You Create" sounds like a Middle-Eastern chant, Scabbia's vocals wandering like a wordless incantation.

A brighter vocal melody boosts the probing lyrics of "Closer": "looking for a higher ground/searching for this something missed before/from a higher ground/will I fall in a right direction?"

"Within Me" carries the weight of the world, "Fragile" and "Our Truth" kick the Middle-Eastern vocal colorings up a notch.

In Lacuna Coil's hands, ending cut "Enjoy the Silence," a Depeche Mode cover, takes on a distinct flavor. Scabbia's vocal cries layer on top of the instrumental texture, giving the song new breadth.

Lacuna Coil twist up the metal world with "Karmacode" - they rock hard, and their music is an exhilarating rush for anyone who goes along for the ride.

## Arts Center Hosts Alastair Noble Lecture

SUMMIT - The Visual Arts Center of New Jersey (VACNJ), located at 68 Elm Street in Summit, will host a lecture by Professor Alastair Noble on "Contemporary Sculpture." Set for January 18 from 7 to 9 p.m. in the Main Gallery at the center, the full title of the lecture is "Contemporary Sculpture - How do we define sculpture today and is it any different from what it was yesterday?"

Mr. Noble, assistant professor of sculpture in the art department at Lafayette College in Pennsylvania, will lend his expertise to the questions that artists and those interested in art are sure how to answer.

According to Professor Noble, "The art of sculpture crosses many boundaries and incorporates a wide

variety of mediums...Artists working today in sculpture weave a poetic vision between the arts, humanities and scientific advances to provide a new form of knowledge."

This sculpture lecture will be presented in conjunction with the current show now up in the main gallery at the VACNJ, "Emerging Artists: Spotlight on Emerging Sculptors."

Tickets for the lecture can be purchased at the door or reservations can be made in advance by calling the art center at (908) 273-9121, extension 46. The fee is \$10 and wine and cheese will be served. In case of inclement weather, the lecture will occur the next evening. For additional information on the VACNJ, visit [artcenternj.org](http://artcenternj.org).



TOOTING THEIR HORNS...Warming up for their holiday concert on Friday, December 22, local students from The Wardlaw-Hartridge School in Edison polished their trombone techniques for seasonal instrumental performances. Pictured, left to right, are: Matthew Nader of Scotch Plains, Gregory Schwartz of Westfield and Philip Edwards of Westfield.

## WESTFIELD FOOD 4 THOUGHT



By JAYNE SALOMON  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

### Indeed, Soup for You!

There's nothing more comforting than a delicious bowl of warm soup on a cold January day. Though the weather recently has been more pleasant than usual, the cold days of January are bound to hit, and our luck will be running out any day now.

I am arming my kitchen with the necessary ingredients to fight back when the frigid temperature of January rears its ugly head. The nice thing about these soups is the ease of preparation. Both soups are similar in nature but yield totally different results. Just wash and peel the vegetables and throw them into a large pot.

I like to put a pot of soup on the stove in the early afternoon and let it simmer all day. This makes the house smell good, and a hearty bowl of soup along with a loaf of warm bread makes a great winter dinner that is healthy and satisfying while keeping the calories in check.

Turn the heat down to simmer immediately and let simmer for approximately one-and-a-half hours. Add the creamed corn and cook for an additional 30 minutes.

Add the cinnamon stick for the last 15 minutes only. The cinnamon gives a smooth flavor without overpowering the unique flavor of the pea/corn combination.

Add the dash of pepper at the end. Soup may be served hot from the pot or may be cooled and put in the blender, which will give it a smoother consistency. If blended, return to pot to heat. Garnish with chopped hazelnuts if desired.

**LENTIL SOUP**  
This hearty soup can be simmered for hours. It is almost impossible to overcook. Should the soup become very thick from simmering, just add more water. The procedure describes the minimal amount of cooking needed for full flavor to be achieved.

**HEARTY PEA SOUP WITH CORN**  
This flavorful soup can be simmered for hours before adding the corn and the cinnamon stick.

**INGREDIENTS**  
8 cups cold water  
1 pound split green peas (rinsed)  
1 medium carrot, cleaned  
5 cloves fresh garlic, peeled  
1 medium onion, peeled  
3 bay leaves  
1-tablespoon sugar  
3 teaspoons salt  
1 can (15.25 ounces) creamed corn  
1 cinnamon stick (optional)  
Dash of pepper  
Garnish: chopped hazelnuts

**PROCEDURE**  
Rinse peas in cool water. Boil the water in a large pot. Add the peas, garlic cloves, onion, carrot, bay leaves, salt and sugar to the boiling water.

**INGREDIENTS**  
6 cups water  
1-1/3 cup lentils (rinsed)  
1 pound of beef chunks (any kind of beef)  
5 or 6 medium to large garlic cloves, peeled  
1 cup diced celery (about 3 stalks, cleaned and trimmed)  
1 cup diced parsnips (about 1 parsnip)  
1-teaspoon kosher salt  
10 to 12 stalks of scallions, cleaned and tips cut off (about 1/4 of green part remaining)  
1-teaspoon fresh thyme or ground thyme  
2 teaspoons sugar  
Dash of cinnamon (optional)  
Garnish: toasted Italian bread & sliced scallion pieces

**PROCEDURE**  
Boil the water in a large pot. Add the lentils and cook for 20 minutes. Add the beef, garlic cloves, celery, parsnips, salt, scallions and cook for one hour. Add the thyme, sugar and cinnamon and cook for 30 additional minutes. Serve hot. Garnish with toasted Italian bread and sliced scallion.