Local theater excellence to be recognized

from STAFF REPORTS

"Recognizing excellence in the Nashville theater community," is the aim of the first DareTheatre Awards, announced today.

"We're hoping to give recognition to the women and men whose performances have entertained local audiences during the past season," said editor Jeff Ellis. "We're very excited about this chance to let our readers, and the theater-going public as a whole, show their appreciation to the actors and productions which have made this past season such an exciting one."

The season, under the rules of the awards competition, began August 1, 1989. Nominees include representatives of Actor's Playhouse, Chaffin's Barn, Circle Players, Nashville Public Theatre, Nashville Shakespeare Festival, Rave Revues, Tennessee Repertory Theatre and TPAC's Second Stage.

Nashville Academy Theatre was not asked to participate, Ellis said, because their productions are continued on page 3

Nashville theaters ready '89-'90 season

Steel Magnolias', 'Into the Woods', 'Bubblin' Brown Sugar' in the wings

by JEFF ELLIS

Theater audiences throughout Nashville and middle Tennessee will be treated to a wide range of offerings during the 1989-90 season, including touring Broadway productions and mid-south premieres of several off-Broadway successes.

Nunsense, the rollicking off-Broadway musical about a convent of wacky nuns in Hoboken, officially kicked off the 1989-90 season at Chaffin's Barn dinner theatre.

Upcoming at that venue is the production of Neil Simon's A Burying B.B., which continues his semi-autobiographical 'B.B.' trilogy which includes Brighton Beach Memoirs and Broadway Bound. Bixed Blues opens September 5.

The musical story of Teyve and his family, Fiddler On The Roof, holds forth at Chaffin's Barn during October. The award-winning show features such standards as "If I Were A Rich Man" and "Tradition." November's show will be announced at a later date, but in December, the comedy Why Begins at 40 opens.

Rave Revues, which calls the Backstage at the Barn area home, opens its new musical revue, Hooray for Hollywood, a re-creation of magical movie moments from Chaplin to Flashdance, Friday, August 11.

September brings Round II of the Assurse Garage (Round III comes in November) and promises shows "crammed full of parodies of contemporary people, places and things. In October, Lullaby of Broadway, three acts of Broadway musical favorites will be presented and, in December, Seasoned Greetings 1989; an update of last year's holiday offering, will be staged.

Circle Players this year celebrates its 40th anniversary season of community theatre. Rodgers and Hammerstein's The King and I, presented in July was the company's official season opener.

Upcoming for Circle Players, which calls the Tennessee Performing Arts Center's (TPAC) Johnson Theatre home, is the Lerner and Loewe musical My Fair Lady, which opens September 5.

The show's two acts are comprised of a series of narratives, continued on page 3

Heartstrings gala set

AIDS benefit features touring performers

by JEFF ELLIS

Memphis and Nashville next month will host gala benefit performances of Heart Strings: The National Tour; a Broadway-style musical review designed to raise funds for AIDS education and direct care services.

Vincent deFrank Hall of Ellis Auditorium will play host to the show during its Memphis performance, Monday, September 25 at 8 p.m.

Tickets are $25 for the performance; $75, which includes the show and a cast party afterwards; and $250, which includes the show, a Sunday brunch and parties before and after the performance, according to Rita Underhill of the Aid to End AIDS Committee (ATEAC).

The show, which is set for the Polk Theatre of the Tennessee Performing Arts Center (TPAC) on Thursday, September 28, will begin with a 6 p.m. black tie cocktail buffet before the show, with the curtain to rise promptly at 7:30 p.m. Ticket prices are $25 for the performance alone; $50 for the show and cast party afterwards; and $100 for the show and pre- and post-performance parties, according to Mary Donnet, who is handling public relations for the gala.

Heart Strings is a project of the Design Industries Foundation for AIDS (DIPFA). The goals of the tour are:

• To mobilize all sectors of the community in the fight against AIDS.
• To raise $4 million across the country for preventive education and direct care services.
• To develop lasting fund-raising skills in local communities.
• To encourage volunteerism.
• To raise public awareness of the AIDS epidemic.

Benefiting from the Nashville performance of Heart Strings:

• Minority AIDS Outreach (MAO), an all-volunteer organization which focuses on preventive education, especially with IV drug users on site in the community.
• Nashville CARES, a community-based United Way Agency which provides social services to people with AIDS, ARC and HIV.
• Vanderbilt AIDS Project (VAP), an organization which features preventive education and consulting and provides assistance for medical research.

Heart Strings will visit 30 cities across the country, opening in Atlanta on September 17. Memphis and Nashville are the third and fourth stops, respectively, on the national tour that will take the cast from Atlanta to Dallas, from Denver to San Francisco, eventually concluding in New York City next spring.

The show's two acts are comprised of a series of narratives, continued on page 3

INSIDE Dare this week

TPAC premieres a new musical, A Rock Wedding, Centerstage, page 6

Theater they'll be talking about: Rave Revues, page 9.

Here's your chance: The First Dare Theatre Awards Ballot, page 12.
**Chattanooga**

**Sundays**
- Metropolitan Community Church: Worship service, Unitarian Church, 7:30pm.
- First Unitarian Church: Worship service, 7pm.

**Mondays**
- Chattanooga CARES: Closed support group, 6:30pm. Info 615 286-2422.
- Aries: Open meeting, 7:30pm. Info 615 320-0294.

**Tuesdays**
- Chattanooga CARES: Open meeting, Unitarian Church, 6pm.
- Aries: Open meeting, 6pm.

**Wednesdays**
- Chattanooga CARES: Open meeting, Unitarian Church, 6pm.

**Johnstown**

**Sundays**
- Metropolitan Community Church: Worship service, 7pm. 
- First Unitarian Church: Worship service, 7pm.

**Knoxville**

**Sundays**
- Metropolitan Community Church: Worship service, 8pm. 
- First Church: Worship service, 7pm.

**Tuesdays**
- Response Knoxville: Circle of Love, 7pm. 
- Aries: Closed meeting, 7pm.

**Wednesdays**
- Response Knoxville: Aries: Open meeting, 7pm.

**Memphis**

**Mondays**
- Memphis CARES: Closed meeting, MCC. 7:30pm.
- First Church: Open meeting, 7:30pm.
- First Church: Open meeting, 7:30pm.

**Tuesdays**
- Memphis CARES: Open meeting, 7:30pm.
- First Church: Open meeting, 7:30pm.

**Wednesdays**
- Memphis CARES: Closed meeting, MCC. 7:30pm.
- First Church: Open meeting, 7:30pm.

**Thursdays**
- F-FLAG: Closed meeting, 7pm.
- First Church: Open meeting, 7:30pm.

**Friday**
- Memphis CARES: Closed meeting, 7pm.
- First Church: Open meeting, 7:30pm.

**Saturday**
- Metropolitan Community Church: Closed meeting, 7pm.
- First Church: Open meeting, 7:30pm.

**Just like clockwork**

**Big Events**

**Saturday, August 12**

**Sunday, August 13**
- Feminist Book Circle: Discussion of Sister Sin, by June Arnold, Unitarian Universalist Church, 108 Harding Place, Chattanooga. Free. Info 615 320-0294.

**Saturday, August 19**

**Saturday and Sunday, August 19 and 20**
- Camping Trip: Sponsored by Knoxville's Ten Percent. Info 615 521-6546.

**Monday, August 21**
- Consciousness Raising: Being Black in a White Man's Arms. Sponsored by Black and White Men Together/Memphis. 7:30pm. Info 726-1461.

**Wednesday, August 23**

**Saturday, August 26**
- Seminar AIDS 101: AIDS Response Knoxville seminar for buddies and friends of PWAs. $15 registration, scholarships available. 9am-5pm. Registration and info 615 525-8020.
...Dare theater awards continued from page 1

directed toward a younger audience than the newspaper's readership includes.
Nashville Playhouse refused to participate in the balloting, citing the paper's lesbian and gay focus as "unsuitable for a Christian-, family-oriented operation," according to artistic director Marianne Clark.

Awards will be presented in ten categories: best musical, best play, best actress in a musical, best actress in a play, best actor in a musical, best actor in a play, best supporting actress in a musical, best supporting actress in a play, best supporting actor in a musical and best supporting actor in a play.

A ballot can be found on page 12 of this issue of Dare, or may be picked up at any of the theater companies participating in the competition.

Ballots must be received by August 28 and the five finalists in each category will be announced in the September 8 issue of Dare.

...Heart Strings benefit in Tennessee continued from page 1

followed by appropriate music and dance. A core group of professional performers and musicians make up the cast of Heart Strings and local performers will also take part in the show, Donnet said, including the Nashville Ballet and Grand Ole Opyr star and Country Music Hall of Fame member Minnie Pearl.

In Nashville, Michael Corzine and Iris Buhi are chairing the local steering committee, and Dudley and Peggy Richter are chairing the host committee. Among members of the Nashville host committee are John Seigenthaler, publisher of The Tennessean; Irby Simpkins, publisher of the Nashville Banner; and Stuart Bivin, publisher of Dare.

Volunteers are needed to help out with all facets of the benefit, Donnet said.

More information about the show is available by calling Corzine at (615) 385-0140 or Buhi at (615) 297-5425.

Nashville CARES receives $1,000 grant

NASHVILLE CARES, an AIDS services organization, was the recipient of a $1,000 grant from a New York-based philanthropic group.

Broadway Cares, a group comprised of members of the New York theater community, in June announced that the local organization would share in the $100,000 in grants awarded.

Celebrities, including Colleen Dewhurst, Gwen Verdon, Jerome Robbins, Helen Hayes and George Segal are among many in the New York theater community who have given their time and talent help people living with AIDS. Broadway Cares, an organization of 38 guilds, unions and association which make up the industry, has raised more than a half million dollars during the past year. Funds are granted throughout the year to community-based organizations across the nation that provide direct care and service for those with AIDS.

An auction of the mask worn by Michael Crawford in The Phantom of the Opera raised $17,000. One of the most unusual fund-raising efforts is a ticket service enabling theater-goers to get seats to hit shows by making a tax-deductible contribution to Broadway Cares equal to the cost of the tickets they are buying. Known as "CareTix," anyone can use the service by calling (212) 974-7500.

Nashville Ballet selected to tour

NASHVILLE BALLET HAS BEEN SELECTED to participate on the 1990-91 Southern Arts Touring Program roster.

Serving nine southeastern states (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee), the Southern Arts Federation's mission is "to preserve and promote the arts of the region."

Touring fee support enables artists to achieve greater exposure in the region. The program enables prospective presenters to make a broad spectrum of the arts available to the public in the seven-state area.

Nashville Ballet is one of 28 regional performing arts groups to have been selected from among the more than 100 applicants.

"Inclusion on the Southern Arts Federation's touring program roster offers Nashville Ballet increase exposure and work opportunities," said Dane LaFontsee, artistic director of the troupe.

"Touring is the life's blood of many ballet companies, both in terms of earned income and numerous diversified performances for the dancers."

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BRIEFS

from STAFF REPORTS

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Announcements

• All welcome to attend a Christian service of healing. First meeting in early September. Focus on Jesus as savior, healer, lover and friend. All in a crisis or not. David, 4306 Blooming Ave, Mpls, MN 55407.

• Do you remember the first time you read Radclyffe Hall's The Well of Loneliness? Dare is looking for your impressions and recollections for a Radclyffe Hall anniversary story. Phone us at 615 327-Dare, and either tell your anecdote or leave your name and number for an interview.

• TWO BEANS TEE SHIRTS: Hot designs! Write for free catalog: 2391 Forrest Avenue #3, Memphis, TN 38112.

• Dare is now in Knoxville! Look for us at the Carousel, the Peppertree, Traditions, Metropolitan Community Church/Knoxville and Davis Kidd Booksellers. Tennessee's Lesbian and Gay Newsweekly.

• WANTED: Reliable, hardworking self-starters in Knoxville, Nashville and Memphis for commissioned ad sales. Great part-time, high-pay work for students, etc. 615 327-Dare.

• WANTED: Reliable and energetic people to help deliver Dare in Chattanooga, Knoxville, Memphis and Nashville. Write Dare, Box 40422, Nashville, 37204 or phone 615 327-Dare.

• LONG HOURS, HARD WORK, LOW PAY. Dare is accepting applications from writers in Chattanooga, Knoxville, Memphis, Nashville, the Tri-cities and around Tennessee. Learn community-oriented journalism, and be one of the best. Dare, Box 40422, Nashville, 37204 or phone 615 327-Dare.


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Nashville theater season

TRT presents its adaptation of Shakespeare's classic tragedy, 
"Romeo and Juliet." October 26-November 12, followed by a 
reprise of the troupe's original holiday musical, 
"Christmas Memories." With a score of traditional 
holiday favorites and original material 
by TRT artistic director 
Mac Pirkle and musical 
director Stan Tucker, the show is 
quickly becoming a 
nashville holiday tra­dition and is set for a 
December 7-23 run. 
Lerner and Loewe's 
"My Fair Lady," which features "I Could Have 
Danced All Night," "On the Street Where 
You Live" and "I've 
Grown Accustomed to 
Her Face," is set for a 
March 15-31 run. 
Perhaps the most eagerly-awaited pro­duction in TRT's sea­son is the Nashville 
premiere of Robert Harling's endearing Southern 
comedy, "Steel Magnolias." An Outer Critics 
Circle Award nominee, "Steel Magnolias" has been 
seated in major American cities, Australia 
and Puerto Rico. Scheduled for May 10-26, 
1990, the stage production will be preceded by the 
December release of the film version star­ring Shirley 
McClaine, Dolly Parton, Darryl 
Hannah and Olympia Dukakis. 
Just 30 miles down I-24, Murfreesboro Little 
Theatre will get the jump on TRT when it 
premieres "Steel Magnolias" for an early-No­vember run. Set in a beauty shop in a small 
Louisiana town, the play features six endearing 
characters. It's set for a 
November 3-11 run at 
MLT. 
Other productions 
scheduled for MLT in­clude the season-opening musical, 
"Godspell," which runs 
September 8-17. Chris­topher Frye's verse play, "The Lady's Not for 
Burning" is set for a 
February 23-March 3 
stand. 
The Andrew Lloyd Webber-Tim Rice in­ternationally-ac­claimed opera, "Evita" concludes the season 
April 20-28. 
The story of the late 
Argentine First Lady Eva Perón, "Evita" features the international hit "Don't Cry for Me, Ar­gentina." 
Actors Playhouse of Nashville, Inc., continuing 
its tradition of innovation and risk-taking, will feature Nashville premiers of several off­Broadway dramas and comedies throughout the coming season. Now a non-profit entity, Actors Playhouse just recently elected its first 
board of directors. 
Nashville Public Theatre will present the musical, "Quilters," September 28-October 15, at the 
Z. Alexander Looby Center on Metro Center Boulevard. The musical tells of the collective experience of the pioneer women who stitched their lives into intricate designs.

BRINGING THE BEST OF BROADWAY, PARTNERED WITH SOME OF SHOW BUSINESS' BRIGHTEST STARS, TPAC PROMISES A SEASON THAT WILL DELIGHT TICKET HOLDERS.

Opening the season on September 19 is the imaginative Tony Award-winning musical "Into the Woods." Created by Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine, this fairy-tale presentation presents time-honored stories in an entertaining new fashion.

Opening October 17 will be Julie Harris and Brock Peters in the Pulitzer Prize-winning drama, "Driving Miss Daisy," the drama focuses on the sometimes hilarious and often touching changes experienced by an eccentric Southern Jewish woman and her black chauffeur, following them from 1948 to 1973.

Neil Simon's "Rumors," starring Jamie Farr, takes the Jackson Theatre stage on February 27. Simon's latest hit, "Rumors" takes place at a dinner party among three couples and explores the comedic question of what happens when rumors start to fly.

Dates have yet to be announced for the Nashville performance of the quintessential Cole Porter musical, "Anything Goes," starring Mitzi Gaynor in the role of evangelist cum chanteuse, Reno Sweeney. Set aboard a triple-tiered ocean liner, this zany plot-twister features scads of Porter songs including "I Get a Kick Out of You," "Friendship," and, of course, "Anything Goes." Debbie Reynolds and Harve Presnell reprise their film roles in the 25th anniversary production of the Meredith Wilson musical, "The Unsinkable Molly Brown." Performance dates have not yet been set for this revival which features some of Wilson's most enduring tunes, including, "I Ain't Down Yet," "Belly Up To The Bar, Boys," and "I'll Never Say No." TPAC also has scheduled an encore Nashville run of "Les Miserables," the captivating story of Jean Valjean.

"Les Miserables" is a timeless story captured in 19th century France," said Warren Summers, TPAC Managing Director. "Brought to life with an astounding musical score, technically superb set and tremendously talented cast and company, it's easy to see why our audiences were so enthralled. Bringing it back to Nash­ville will give Les Miserables fans a chance to experience it again, as well as afford the opportunity to those who missed it the first time.

Dates have yet to be announced, but it is speculated that "Les Miserables" will make its second Nashville appearance in spring, 1990.
When the house lights go down and the stage lights go up in the Tennessee Performing Arts Center's (TPAC) Johnson Theatre next Thursday night, theater history will be made in Nashville with the production of A Rock Wedding.

The musical, written by Jan Scarbrough, is an "old-fashioned love story," according to the Nashville playwright/composer, with such contemporary twists as fantasy sequences which were filmed to intersperse with the live action onstage. The entire cast and company of A Rock Wedding has a definite Nashville flavor, with the exception of director/choreographer Derek Wolfson and artistic consultant Mark Medoff, author of Children of a Lesser God.

The world premiere of A Rock Wedding is being produced and mounted by TPAC, in hopes of an ultimate trip to Broadway. Several New York producers and financiers have been invited to Music City for the show in hopes of securing their backing for a possible Broadway production.

Choosing Nashville as the site for the show's world premiere is a natural, according to TPAC's managing director Warren Sumners. "Nashville has such a wealth of musical and acting talent. We wanted to cast from Nashville so that local artists could take advantage of this wonderful opportunity — a pre-Broadway production. This way, it is truly a Nashville effort."

THE WORKSHOP METHOD of preparing shows for possible production on Broadway is becoming a more common avenue for would-be playwrights and composers. A budget of $8-10 million would be needed to mount the production for a Broadway opening, but for TPAC's opening, a budget of $155,000 will cover the production costs.

"People just aren't willing to risk that much money on a show that may or may not make it on Broadway," Scarbrough said. "That's why regional theaters, such as TPAC, have taken on the responsibility of producing new works."

Scarbrough's "old-fashioned love story" is set to original music and state-of-the-art video wizardry and is centered on rock star Jackie Howard (played by Lari White), seen locally in Rave Revues' Almost a Midsummer Night's Dream and Nashville Public Theatre's The Cask of Amontillado) and music journalist Marshall Brenner (local actor David Lakey, who has had roles in Grease and Hamlet).

"Lari is absolutely perfect. She has the same intensity that a lot of rock and rollers have," Scarbrough said. "We're thrilled with the entire cast."

Jackie and Marshall meet when he is assigned to do a story about her for Music Scene Magazine. Jackie invites Marshall to accompany her home for her sister's wedding, which offers him a glimpse of the "real" Jackie Howard.

The idea behind A Rock Wedding came from Scarbrough's own trip home for her brother's wedding several years ago.

"After my brother's wedding, I thought weddings were so boring, that they needed some rock music to liven them up," she says.

From that experience, the idea for A Rock Wedding came to be and for the past six years Scarbrough has been working on the show.

"I must be demented to have decided to do a musical," she confesses.

During that time, the show was work-shopped at New Mexico State University, where Scarbrough, under Medoff's guidance, re-wrote and fine-tuned the book and score.

FOR SCARBROUGH, writing the book for a musical and composing its score comes naturally.

"I grew up thinking I was going to be a poet," she says. "But when I was 16 or 17 someone taught me to play the guitar and that changed my direction. Then when I took a playwriting course under Mark Medoff, I began to consider that influenced me."

Now, Scarbrough is ready to unveil her first full-length musical for scrutiny by the public and the critics.

"Everyone hopes their show will be a success and go on to Broadway. This one has as good a chance, maybe even better, as anything," she says.

Actor Brad Kuykendall, who plays Jackie's boyfriend Paul in the show, says A Rock Wedding "has great possibilities" to become a bonafide hit.
"I don't think Jan could have made this show any more different from anything you've seen before," he says. "It's definitely going to work."

The filmed scenes, which do everything from showing character's fantasies to progressing the plot, are perhaps the most innovative parts of the production.

The show includes 52 video vignettes, amounting to a total of 30 minutes of edited material. The video segments were shot on film, then transferred to video disc.

Selection of the Johnson Theatre, which will seat only 200 for A Rock Wedding, will enable the audience to have a more personal reaction to the show, Scarbrough and Kuykendall said.

"There are a lot of funny characters in this show," Kuykendall said. "And Jan's story really works. There's a cohesive-ness in this company that's not always found when doing something like this."

Among those funny characters will probably be the one played by Kuykendall: soap opera star Paul, Jackie's boyfriend. Described by Kuykendall as a "sleazy, slimy egomaniac from L.A."

"Paul thinks the world revolves around him," Kuykendall explains. "He and Jackie have been dating for a couple of years and mainly goes home with her for her sister's wedding because he thinks it would be good for him to be seen with a big rock star."

Fairly early in the play's action, however, Paul becomes bored with the wedding preparations and is affronted by being kicked out of his hotel and being forced to sleep on the floor.

The role of Paul comes easily for Kuykendall who just moved to Nashville two months ago from Los Angeles to pursue a career in country music.

"A friend told me I should check into this new show they're doing at TPAC. I told him I wasn't interested because I didn't want to act anymore, I was a singer and a songwriter," he says. "But I became intrigued with how they were going to put it all together."

For Scarbrough the most difficult roles to cast were the parts of Jackie's father and mother and the eccentric Uncle Bill.

"We ended up casting actors much younger than I had written it for, but in the end, it turned out that everyone we cast were in the right age range," she said.

Radio personality Patrick Reilly will play Jackie's estranged father; Karen Taylor-Good her mother; and Rob Daniel was cast as Uncle Bill. Denice Hicks will play Jackie's sister Ally, the bride-to-be.

Set design is by Brian Laczko, costumes by Cindy Russell, and make-up and hair design by Roberta Samet. Musical director is Scott Jarrett and Randy Hale is video producer.
STATE OF THE ART
How good is Nashville theatre? The critics speak

by LAURA TEK
Contributing Writer

THE PERFORMING ARTS in Nashville

Is there really such a thing?

Yes, indeed, according to Beth Monin of the Nashville Banner, Clara Heironymous of The Tennessean and Angela Wilking of The Nashville Business Journal. The three of them, along with Jeff Ellis, comprise the membership of one of the city's most exclusive clubs — theater critics for the city's newspapers.

Just what is currently the state of the theater in Nashville? That was the question put to Monin, Heironymous and Wilking.

Wilking has worked at the Business Journal for about 18 months. She grew up in Nashville, but moved away more than 10 years ago to experience New York and Los Angeles. What are her perceptions of Nashville theater now?

"Theater here is basically very good. Over the past three to four years, I've seen a real growth of theater groups that are providing ongoing theater. But as far as the audiences go, I think that's grown at a much slower pace than those groups would like to see happen," she says. "This is because we don't have a heritage of going to the theater in this part of the country. It's not just Nashville, it's all over the state and all over the southeast.

We just don't have a history of our parents taking us to the theater. I personally did not see a professional production until I was in college and I think that's what's happened to a lot of us growing up in Tennessee."

Heironymous has been an arts critic for The Tennessean for some 33 years. Ask her to elaborate on any piece of theatrical history in Nashville and she'll tell you just what she thinks.

"There is a lot of theater here, very good theater. The problem with the theaters not getting the audiences is not because of lack of advertising. We advertise everything. The problem is that Nashville has not ever become a strong theater city. It has always been that way," she says.

Monin has worked at the Banner for three years and has been its theater and dance critic for the past two. She agrees that it's hard to get the audiences out to the shows.

"The biggest challenge facing the Nashville theater community is getting the audience out to see the shows. And that seems to plague every theater company from Tennessee Repertory Theatre (TRT) to the little fringe community groups," she says.

DO NASHVILLE'S theatrical groups play it safe?

"Yes," says Heironymous. "TRT certainly plays it safe to some extent. I was just looking at their shows for next season, Ain't Misbehavin', My Fair Lady, Romeo and Juliet. These are all shows that will obviously have community appeal. Circle Players does the same thing. They pick the shows that are likely to attract audiences, ones that are tried and true, with proven track records."

"WIT, about to enter its fifth season, didn't particularly have as financially successful a last season as they had hoped," Wilking says. "Part of it was because of the shows they picked. Plays of various genres were used, and it scared off audiences a little bit. It was maybe too high brow for them."

Monin agrees: "Yes, a lot of companies here have to play it safe, they have to, or nobody comes. But every one in a while, some will do something a little bit daring and it's refreshing."

"Actors' Playhouse is one of the few theaters in Nashville that have done some risky, experimental and controversial things," Heironymous says.

"Their production of The Marriage of Figaro, a play by Christopher Durang, was great. It really stretched your imagination," Monin adds. It was something that hadn't been seen here in Nashville as far as I know. It was a theater that really pushes the boundaries.

"I, would hope that more theaters could do that, but they can't get people to come and buy tickets. They unfortunately are taking foolish risks."

However, Monin says, "some just refuse to worry about money, like the Nashville Shakespeare Festival (NSF) that performs for free in Centennial Park. They do things on a shoestring. Last year's production, As You Like It, was a very good show, yet it initially got very little support from the parks."

"I applaud the NSF. It's done in a beautiful park, it's centrally located. A lot of people who may not have access to a theater otherwise, such as lower economic groups, ethnic groups, they go to the park and if you can provide a free play and experience them they may be introducing them to their first theater experience," Wilking said. "It's free and the audiences they've drawn proves that people are receptive to that. They had over two thousand people see As You Like It last year in just five or six performances, and I assume they are doing just as well because last year they had no budget or publicity, and it's pretty much the same situation this year. They've managed to draw that many people on no budget.

"A lot of people who would never go to see Broadway productions, says Monin. "I think, unfortunately, that a lot of people think that anything produced in Nashville wouldn't be worth your buck. The only show that they're willing to pay money for is something that has the cachet of having come from New York."

Wilking agrees: "Audiences like to go to something that they've heard of, so they are going to go to see performances of actors who have most likely appeared on Broadway. They are going to see the names, the glitzy costumes, the fancy sets, etc. To them it's an insurance, they want to get their money's worth."

"Why won't Nashvillians attend more locally-produced theatre?"

"The answer is television," Heironymous answers. "It's had a big impact on the community. Videos, too. It's a lot easier to sit in a home in your own living room and be entertained.

"But I still feel cheered and somewhat optimistic at the number of companies here that are hanging on and trying to come up with local productions. In such a small city, you're seeing a lot of good performances. I'm really encouraged by what's available to cast a show."

"The one that all of us see is still the critic most sharply critical of local audiences:"

"I don't think that Nashville audiences are the best in the world. Sometimes I find myself reviewing the audience. I think it's because when people are not in the habit of going to the theater, they act more like audiences at rock concerts. I really get my back up with the way they respond. They emit little yelps and yelps, especially the women, as if to say, 'look, I'm reacting, I'm enjoying it. I want you to know this.' But I hate it, it's very distracting to those who really want to enjoy the performance. You don't have to act that way to respond to a production."

"I see many different audiences in Nashville, Wilking observes. "The one that attends the Broadway series has never been inside Actors' Playhouse. The one that goes to Chaffin's Barn has never been inside TPAC. I think the challenge among all the theater groups is to tap into the different audiences that are there and not take them away from that theater but show them that it's enjoyable to see a Sam Shepard play as well. Not everyone is going to cross over to that, but I think that there are some audience members of each group that could be hared into another situation but that would take a lot of cooperation among all the theater groups."

ALL THREE CRITICS believe that the remedy for this audience's lack of sophistication is to educate children about theater.

"There should be more interest in the theater and in the visual arts in the public schools," Heironymous suggests. "There should be trained teachers so they can in turn communicate not only what the theater is, but how you can enjoy it, and how you should behave."

Monin agrees, "I think what's going to change the Nashville theater audiences' minds is teaching children to enjoy theater. Teaching children that going to the theater is not something weird, or expensive, something that you can only do when you go to New York. But that it is an alternative to going to the movies. And there are groups in Nashville working on that, such as Nashville Academy Theatre. That's our best hope for educating an audience. When you grow up with not a lot of theater around, you can't expect people to suddenly say, 'oh, let's go to the theater.'"

How do the three critics feel about theater groups asking them not to review their productions?

"When a company asks me not to review a production, or to print only the favorable reviews, that's sad," Heironymous answers.

"That's not really theater when they do that because even the best theaters in the world can't always have a hit show because there are always so many elements that have got to come together like the cast, the director, the choreographer, the costumes, etc. You critique a show for the actors. You owe it to the actors because if it's good, you might be able to help them."

"And if it's critical, they can also maybe recognize the things that may have gone wrong. I find that the actors always want to be reviewed positively."

"Also there's another reason for a review and that's if you don't do one, it's almost as if the show didn't exist. A review in the paper documents it, it says it happened, and it says what happened. That's important. That's history."

ALL IN ALL, how do the critics judge the health of the performing arts in Nashville?

Heironymous sums it up this way, "I think, all things considered, theater here is fairly healthy. Almost a Midsummer Night's Dream at Backstage at the Barn was selling out at the end of its run. Actors' Playhouse has just begun a late-night series in addition to its main production."

"In the last five months there has been a real upsurge in the number of performances in Nashville, Monin says. "Now that renaissance, that boom, may be dead in two months, but for right now there are no signs of collapse. We do seem to have major theater that really seems viable."

"Theater is important to people," Heironymous adds. "The resurgence of the community theaters in and around Nashville give that evidence. Like the fabulous invalid, theater always manages somehow to live."

"We are hoping that this boom right now isn't just an oddity," Wilking says. "By the end of this summer, there will have been over 20 productions in Nashville, last summer there were maybe 10. No one seems to know why, but we hope it continues. I think it looks real good for theater in Nashville to continue to offer a lot of different choices, every month and I think that's what's going to make the difference is showing the audience all of the possible choices, because there are a lot of different audiences out there and that's how theater will grow and hang on, by offering Nashville a choice."

Theater critic Beth Monin — NASHVILLE BANNER STAFF PHOTO

Theater critic Angela Wilking — NASHVILLE BUSINESS JOURNAL STAFF PHOTO
Drawing rave reviews with Rave Revues

by STUART DIVIN

RAVE REVUES IS AN appropriate name for one of the few theater ventures that can really live up to its advance billing.

Like no other theater company in Nashville, this troupe’s acclaim can be attributed to artistic co-directors Michael Bouson and Katie Gladfelter, who are the primary reasons for the company’s decidedly different approach.

Rave Revue’s hallmarks are the company’s high energy and predilection for mounting original shows — many written by members of the company itself, and often with music commissioned by the company.

But the real beginnings for the troupe were in the 1984 Theatre Express original production of Everybody’s Peachy in Kiddie Land at the old JohnCalt West End Theatre (now Acton’s Playhouse). Capitoli Park Inn’s management staff, Bouson explained, then asked him to put together an improvisational piece to run as the late show at the Inn’s Patchwork Theatre.

Assassin Garage was born an instant hit, running successfully until management decided to close the less-successful main stage.

The same core group which helped to create the generally-recognized lunacy that Assassin Garage was noted for then played at the Elliston Place nightclub Exit/In during the summer of 1985 until the club changed to an all-music format and then closed.

Bouson and Gladfelter joined forces when she was appearing as part of the pop/jazz quartet SRO at the Metro Dinner Theatre at the World’s End restaurant.

Bouson, in the time-honored theater tradition of show doctor, helped the group fine-tune their show, which then played to sold-out houses. The group broke up after its run at the Metro, but management so liked the show, Bouson said, that he was asked to stage another show at the theater.

Rave Revues opened its run at the Metro with Music of the Night, a revue of Tim Rice/Andrew Lloyd Webber pieces, and continued with Seasoned Greetings, a holiday musical comedy variety show and Stompin’ with Savoy, another musical revue.

When plans were made earlier this year to convert the Metro into the video club Midnight Sun, Bouson said Rave Revues began discussions with the management at Chaffin’s Barn Dinner Theatre about creating the Backstage at the Barn space for Rave Revues.

Thanks for the Memories, which had originally been planned for the Metro, was instead opened at Backstage, where the company has also presented the critically-acclaimed Southern Exposure, the Allison As Noises, and Almost a Midsummer Night’s Dream.

Horray for Hollywood, a revue of movie musicals which Bouson describes as “fluff but a great show,” opens tonight.

The fast-paced show will recreate magical moments of movie history from Charlie Chaplin to A Chorus Line — The Movie.

The show features Rave Revues stalwarts, soprano Su Hyatt and alto Martha Gabel, along with tenor Robert Whorton and baritone Michael Lee. Rave Revues is in negotiations with a cruise line to mount a production of Horray for Hollywood on board cruise ships. If a deal is struck, Bouson says, he and Gladfelter will cast the show locally and send the production to Miami.

...theater books

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theater, actors and playwrights are hard to come by. Little has been written, and some of the most useful information is in books now out of print. Three books are currently available that shed some light on lesbian and gay theater:


Biographies of gay or lesbian figures from theater frequently overlook or hide their subject’s sexuality. Those that do address the issue may sensationalize or condemn it. A few books, all of which deal with men, are of particular interest:


- Callow traces Laughton’s career from early theatre successes in London to Hollywood stardom.


Noel Coward epitomized the beauty and glamour of youth, becoming the spokesman for the “bright young things” of the 1920s.

By the 1950s, new wave theatre, taken with disillusionment and disenchantment, replaced Coward’s style of charm and sophistication.

Coward replied: “I don’t care for the current trends in literature or the theatre. Subdey, discretion, restraint, finesse, charm, intelligence, good manners, talent and glamour still enchant me.”


A Chorus Line, the longest-running show in Broadway history, is the masterpiece of Michael Bennett, whose brilliant career as a choreographer was cut short when he died of AIDS.
Gay and lesbian theater books abound

From Mart Crowley's landmark The Boys in the Band to the 1990 edition of Jane Chambers' Love Scenes: Albert Immel's black comedy The Transformation of Benvo Bimpie, a surprisingly large number of plays with lesbian or gay characters or themes are available from American publishers.


In addition to Hoffman's introduction, which provides historical information, this collection includes Love Scenes by Jane Chambers, The Queen's Governor by William Hoffman and Anthony Holland, The Killing of Sister George by Frank Marcus, Confessions of a Female Disorder by Susan Miller, Entertaining Mr. Sloane by Joe Orton, Taboo by Robert Patrick, Boy Meets Boy by Bill Solly and Donald Ward and The Madness of Lady Bright by Lanford Wilson.


An alphabetical list of over 400 plays, with plot and character summaries and information on rights.


Plays with lesbian or gay characters or themes include Howard Brenton's Romans in Britain, A Taste of Honey by Shelagh Delaney, Badly by Simon Gray, Christopher Hampton's The Black Tulip, The Life in the Universe by Lillian Hellman, A Pair of Pears by John Osborne, Streamsers by David Rabe and Tennessee Williams' Small Craft Warnings.

Sources on the history of gay and lesbian continued on page 9
The Redthroats

reviewed by JOE MAROHL
Staff Writer

THE BEST WRITING TAKES chances. The same principle applies to the theater and the other arts. The same principle applies, I suppose, to life, also.

The Redthroats is a collection of dramatic performance pieces by the English artist David Cale. Actually, the book contains two complete programs, "The Redthroats," a fragment of which Cale performed on Bette Midler's Mundo Beyondo show on HBO last year, and "Smooch Music."

For the last decade, Cale has resided in New York where he performs his pieces at places like The Kitchen and Performance Space 122. His work is a hybrid of SoHo hipster and English music hall, with strong flavorings of jazz music and Wordsworthian reminiscence. Pretty chancy combinations, these, and they don't always succeed.

As a presence, he's a tall and balding wide-eyed child, who speaks with all the throaty urgency of young Hayley Mills. A sense of all this courses through his writing.

The subject of the semi-autobiographical "The Redthroats" is a family called the Weirds, particularly the son, Steven, a boy criticized by his parents for wanting to emulate Judy Garland ("It's not healthy, an eleven-year-old boy listening to a dead woman sing!"). Steven later divides his time hustling masochists at the cartoon cinema and wrangling the child actors in a production of Annie.

The piece begins with a recollection of catching redthroat minnows in a shallow pond near his home and ends with a dramatization of his flight over the Atlantic when he moves to New York.

"Smooch Music" is less strictly narrative, less strictly realistic, and explores the tenuous nature of contemporary sexual relationships. In this piece, the speaker's sexuality is more ambiguous, sometimes bisexual, sometimes more ambiguous than even that.

The most inventive and provocative parts are when gender is irrelevant. For instance, at one point Cale imagines himself as a microbe entering his lover's body in search of his lover's heart, only to find himself hopelessly lost. Without food or an escape route, the microbe begins to feed on the lover's internal flesh, thus weakening and presumably destroying the lover.

Undoubtedly, as with most dramatic works, something is lost by reading The Redthroats as a book instead of seeing it performed on stage. The monologues are less like the Jane Wagner/Lily Tomlin collaboration in The Search for Intelligent Life in the Universe than like Sandra Bernhard's Without You I'm Nothing.

Cale's work lacks the brilliance of either Wagner's or Bernhard's comedy, but it is still literate and entertaining.

From Cale's perspective, love doesn't make sense and is probably unhealthy too. As the musical refrains in "Smooch Music" repeat, "Don't let your lover make a mess of you," but always be ready, nevertheless, to be "Taking a chance on love."

Gay and lesbian theater books abound

by SHERRE DRYDEN
Book Editor

From Mart Crowley's landmark The Boys in the Band to the 1989 edition of Jane Chambers' Late Snow, Albert Innaurato's black comedy The Transformation of Benvoso Blimpie, a surprisingly large number of plays with lesbian or gay characters or themes are available from American publishers.


In addition to Hoffman's introduction, which provides historical information, this collection includes Late Snow by Jane Chambers, The Queen's Governor by William Hoffman and Anthony Holland, The Killing of Sister George by Frank Marcus, Confessions of a Female Disorder by Susan Miller, Entertaining Mr. Sloane by Joe Orton, T-shirts by Robert Patrick, Boy Meets Boy by Bill Solly and Donald Ward and The Madness of Lady Bright by lanford Wilson.


An alphabetical list of over 400 plays, with plot and character summaries and information on rights.


Plays with lesbian or gay characters or themes include Howard Brenton's Romains in Britain: A Taste of Honey by Shelagh Delaney, Bullying by Simon Gray, Christopher Hampton's Total Eclipse, The Children's Hour by Lillian Hellman, A Patriot for Me by John Osborne, Streamers by David Rabe and Tennessee Williams' Small Craft Warnings.

Sources on the history of gay and lesbian
continued on page 9
Best Actress in a musical
- Adele Akin, My Name is Alice, CP
- Sharon Farmer, Frivolities, CP
- Martha Gabel, Almost A Midsummer Night's Dream, RR
- Kevin Allen, Table Settings, AP
- Su Hyatt, Seasoned Greetings, RR
- Su Hyatt, All New Avante Garde, RR
- Trish Jackson, My Name is Alice, CP
- Terri Lynn, Southern Exposures, RR
- Elizabeth Moses, Seasoned Greetings, RR
- Karen Mueller, The King and I, CP
- Lisa Mulvaney, My Name is Alice, CP
- Ginger Newman, Evita, TRT
- Ginger Newman, Pirates of Penzance, TRT
- Suzette Telli, Pippin, CP
- Patty Weyen, My Name is Alice, AP

Best Supporting Actress in a musical
- Melissa Bedinger, Dracula, CP
- Vickie Wonders Foltz, Adventures of Pericles, NSF
- Jerri Hicks, You Can't Take It With You, TRT
- Margaret Houston, Social Security, AP
- Leslie Lacey, Curse of the Starving Class, AP
- Elizabeth Moses Mahowald, On Golden Pond, CB
- Rine Nachman, Table Settings, AP
- Sheila Newman, You Can't Take It With You, TRT
- Nelda Pope, Social Security, AP
- Keli Sims, The Butler Did It, AP
- Mary Louise Smith, The Mousetrap, CP

Best Actor in a play
- Jim Conrad, Bent, AP
- Rob Daniel, Cave Dwellers, NPT
- Anthony Dickens, Dracula, CP
- Dennis Ewing, P.S. Your Cat Is Dead, AP
- Dennis Ewing, It Had To Be You, AP
- Dennis Ewing, Table Settings, AP
- Thomas Greer, Cave Dwellers, NPT
- Rick Harrell, Bent, AP
- Rick Harrell, Lone Star, AP
- Rick Harrell, Sexual Perversion in Chicago, AP
- Tim Holder, Social Security, AP
- Joe Keenan, On Golden Pond, Barn
- Tommy Kohl, Sorrows of Stephen, AP
- Tommy Kohl, Transformations, NPT
- David Lee, Transformations, NPT
- Leon Miller, Adventures of Pericles, NSF
- Scott Moreno, Lone Star, AP
- Myke Mueller, The Blood Knot, TRT

Best Supporting Actor in a musical
- Thom Byrum, The King and I, CP
- Gregg Colson, Frivolities, CP
- Rob Daniel, Pippin, CP
- Bill Hood, Unsinkable Molly Brown, CP
- W. Dennis Hunt, Pirates of Penzance, TRT
- Mike Norman, Almost A Midsummer Night's Dream, RR
- Mike Norman, Working, AP
- Ricky Russell, Evita, TRT
- Randy Sea, Frivolities, CP
- Rick Sea, Frivolities, CP
- Barry Scott, Christmas Memories, TRT
- Barry Scott, Pirates of Penzance, TRT