



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Let the Rave begin Top 10 local entertainment stories of 2006

Sunday, December 31, 2006

By James Sanford and John Liberty

Kalamazoo Gazette

1. Rave Cityplace 14 opens. Downtown Kalamazoo has been without a first-run movie theater since the Bijou closed in the late 1980s. But no more: Rave Cityplace 14, featuring digital projection on 10 of its screens and 2,900 seats, opened in November at the corner of South and Portage streets. "There's a lot of civic pride involved in this project," Rave Motion Pictures vice president of marketing Jeremy M. Devine said in September. "My people are very proud of what you people have going on culturally, and this will fit in well. ... I think you're innovative and forward-thinking in terms of what you've done with your downtown."
2. "Kalamazoo?" comes to Kalamazoo. Shot in and around the Kalamazoo area in the summer of 2004, "Kalamazoo?" the movie premiered locally in April. The comic fantasy, produced by sisters Joanna Clare Scott and Dana Kowalski, grossed more than \$40,000 in its first month of release at Kalamazoo 10. "It far and away exceeded expectations," said Kalamazoo 10 theater manager Mitch Ross. Scott said last week that Westar Entertainment has picked up the film for distribution and will be taking it out on a further theatrical release in the United States starting Jan. 19.
3. "Phantom" haunts Miller. Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical "The Phantom of the Opera" brought in nearly \$3.2 million at the box office during its month-long stay at Miller Auditorium and attracted ticket buyers from 32 states, Canada and the District of Columbia. But the Miller staff was particularly pleased to find that 63 percent of the "Phantom" fans were local residents. "We had about 41,000 in local sales," said Miller director of marketing and development Tracey Lawie.
4. Silver Leaf Renaissance Faire moves. Since 1991, the Silver Leaf Renaissance Faire, a popular medieval attraction, called Kalamazoo County home. But when a disagreement about usage fees between fair organizers and Kalamazoo County officials could not be resolved, Silver Leaf organizers started looking for a new home. They relocated to Battle Creek's Kimball Pines Park for 2006. Fair organizer Stephen Conrad said the festival had its largest attendance, almost 23,000, this summer. This year's event will run on weekends from July 7 to Aug. 5. Information is available at www.silverleafrenfaire.org.
5. The laughter dies at Gary Fields' Comedy Club. After opening with much ballyhoo in downtown Kalamazoo in February 2005, Gary Fields' Comedy Club abruptly closed its doors in June of this year. Owner Fields claimed his landlords had terminated his lease; a representative of building owner Shakespeare LLC claimed he had only notified Fields that his rent was past due. Fields shut down anyway and has since concentrated on operating his club in Battle Creek.
6. Ingrid Fliter named Gilmore Artist. Argentinian pianist Ingrid Fliter was announced in January by the selection committee of the Irving S. Gilmore International Keyboard festival as the 2006 Gilmore Artist. Fliter is the first woman to join a group that also includes Piotr Anderszewski, Leif Ove Andsnes, Ralf Gothoni and David Owen Norris. Fliter played a solo recital May 2 and performed alongside the Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra in a Gala Festival Finale May 6 that, in the words of critic C.J. Gianakaris, "marked the start of a love fest between Gilmore followers and 2006 Gilmore Artist Ingrid Fliter, for whom the evening was a pronounced triumph." Fliter will return to town April 27 to perform a free recital at Chenery Auditorium.

7. "Comic Evangelists" spread the word out West. With a paltry budget of \$44, local filmmaker Daniel Jones and local improv comedy troupe Crawlspace Eviction created the mockumentary "Comic Evangelists," which follows a Christian improv comedy troupe and their mission to spread the gospel. The film premiered locally in April and was invited to the American Film Institute Fest in Los Angeles in November. More than 3,500 films from around the world were submitted, and just 256 were accepted. Collaboration between Jones and Crawlspace continues with another mockumentary tentatively scheduled to begin filming this summer, said Dann Sytsma, a Crawlspace Eviction member and the film's co-director. For more information or to learn how to buy the DVD of "Comic Evangelists," go to www.comicevangeliststhemovie.com.

8. WMU's theater department turns 100. It started with two one-act plays at the Western State Normal School in 1906 and was known as the "Department of Expression." One hundred years later, Western Michigan University's Department of Theatre is presenting nine full-length productions. The theater has continued to grow over 100 years, including the addition of a \$5.4 million educational theater wing in 1994 and an MFA in Performing Arts Administration program in 2002. The centennial season began with director of multicultural theater Von Washington's "Remnants From Senegal" and concluded with "Next Stop Broadway," a cabaret by the department's graduating seniors.

9. Barry Ross retires from K-College, KCCO. A professor of music at Kalamazoo College, Ross announced his retirement after 34 years at the school. Ross, who also founded the Kalamazoo College and Community Orchestra a dozen years ago, took the podium for his "Grand Finale" June 3-4 at the college's Dalton Theater. Ross conducted "Unfinished" Symphony No. 8 by Franz Schubert. Gazette reviewer Mark Wedel said of the first night, "Ross has always been a friendly and informative ambassador for classical music, and this concert reflected that." Ross remains active in the community's classical scene as the assistant conductor of the Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra and the director of the new Kalamazoo String Orchestra, a group of 20 area high school students that performed its inaugural concert in November.

10. District 211 serves its last meal. District 211, the 6-year-old upscale eatery that featured jazz and blues in its downstairs lounge, closed July 1. General manager Dave Carroll did not give a reason for the shutdown, saying only that it was "a rather sudden decision."

Also in 2006

- Harvey's on the Mall, 416 S. Burdick St., reopened Aug. 24. Harvey's originally closed Dec. 9, 2001, and later opened as South Town Food & Spirits in June 2002. South Town then closed Jan. 30, 2004, and the location remained vacant until August.
- The owner of the building housing Club Soda at 340 E. Michigan Ave. announced in September that the legendary nightclub will close by late February.
- Construction started on the Wild Bull Saloon & Steak Pit behind Monaco Bay at 139 S. Edwards St., with opening tentatively planned for Jan. 25.
- Metro, a 7,500-square-foot bar and dance club at 411 N. Westnedge Ave., opened May 26.
- Several local hangouts underwent significant renovations, including Up & Under, 711 W. Michigan Ave., and Martini's Pizza, 832 S. Westnedge Ave.
- The eight musicians of Opus 21 achieved more national recognition with the 2005-06 First Prize for Adventurous Programming from Chamber Music America and the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers.
- Fontana Chamber Arts received its second Award for Adventurous Programming from Chamber Music America and ASCAP. Fontana previously won the award in 2005.

James Sanford can be reached at 388-8553 or

jsanford@kalamazoogazette.com. He is a member of Crawlspace Eviction and recused himself from deciding its place in the Top 10. John Liberty can be reached at 388-8579 or jliberty@

kalamazoogazette.com.

©2007 Kalamazoo

© 2007 Michigan Live. All Rights Reserved.