

By JUNE HATCHER
Entertainment Editor

The Backstage Playhouse is in the process of making some changes, and many of them are visible to the eye, while many are still on the drawing board. Bettye Elmore more recently became the sole owner of the dinner theater, the only one in this area, and she held a sneak preview of the upcoming show last night for members of the press and to honor the many volunteers who make the theater a success.

Her letter of welcome that was on each table told of some of the work that is in process, but also told of the changes that will not be made, especially keeping the professional quality of the plays, the friendly atmosphere, and the fine food at reasonable prices.

Besides being treated to the champagne supper, the surprise of the new paint, carpet, lamps, etc., of the remodeling, the guests were given a special performance of the upcoming show, *An Evening With Mark Twain*, a one-man show by Michael Mauldin that will open Friday and play for three weekends, with a special performance this Sunday evening.

When there is only one actor on the stage and four pieces of furniture, plus some plants, there is very little to talk about, right? Not so!

Forgetting the wonderful material of the American humorist, and Mr. Mauldin

uses only Mr. Twain's words, the show is spellbinding, and one that no actor can improve upon, not even Hal Holbrook who made the Mark Twain Evenings so popular.

The idea is to take the theatergoer back in time to 1905 when Mark Twain was on a final lecture tour. These are the stories he would tell, with the midwestern accent that has found a trace of New England in it.

All he needs is a podium, desk, library table and a chair for furniture, plus a glass for water, cigars, and an old newspaper for the realism that is enhanced by the careful lighting that has been worked out.

Mr. Mauldin walks, talks, moves his hands, feet, neck, his entire body, as an old man with arthritis would.

His timing, and use of the short sentence of Twain's to draw a laugh from each phrase are exquisite.

But Mr. Mauldin plays more than one character in this evening visit with Twain. He has Twain become an Old San Francisco storyteller whose reminiscences get in the way of his story. He also has a segment of a reporter interviewing the young Twain, playing both parts as the elder Twain would. He talks to himself, sits and thinks, smokes cigars, and calls his lecture a service.

The first half of the program is light and is often interrupted by applause, while during the second half, Twain sometimes gets

aggravated at the world, reform, missionaries, etc.

There is one beautifully poetic segment when Mark Twain recounts life on the Mississippi, especially a description of sunrise on the river that held last night's audience breathless.

In fact, this audience of newspeople and area performers, those local people who could be the most critical, spent the evening laughing, applauding, quiet as church mice, then rising for the curtain call.



Megan Yore
58900 Cherry Grove Road
Dowagiac, MI 49047

Terry Kippenberger
Mainstage Management
8144A Big Bend Blvd.
St. Louis, MO 63119

Dear Terry:

Just a short note to say how much we here at Southwestern Michigan College enjoyed having Michael Mauldin on campus to perform his wonderful rendition of *An Evening With Mark Twain*.

The makeup process Mr. Mauldin underwent to become the "grand old man of letters" was in and of itself amazing. Faculty and staff who met Mr. Mauldin that afternoon were truly astounded by the remarkable transformation. In addition, Mr. Mauldin's mannerisms, speech, and movements all did well to support the illusion. His selections were truly humorous and totally appropriate for a family audience.

Mr. Mauldin also presented a short lecture the afternoon before the performance to area high school students and our own drama students. I am sure that these young people gleaned as much from his thoughts as I did: his views on the state of humor and irony in our society were wholly insightful, as were his opinions about the demise of theatre unfortunately existing at present, Hollywood "stars" versus working actors, and the experiences an actor undergoes to become successful. All of his views enlightened the students to understand that a person can become an actor without having to drop out of school, head to California, and wait to be discovered.

We so enjoyed having Mr. Mauldin here, and would definitely like to see him return in a few seasons.

Sincerely,

Megan Yore
Coordinator of Public Information and Community Services



PIRATE PLAYHOUSE

Michael Mauldin
2835 South Fort Avenue
Apt. 807
Springfield, MO 65807

Dear Michael,

I just wanted to take one more opportunity to thank you for the three spectacular performances of *An Evening with Mark Twain* you presented for us last month. I have seen you do the show off and on for nearly eighteen years now, and I can only say that you get better every year. Jaded as I am, and knowing you so well, I still come away from every performance feeling as if I've met Twain himself.

Your performances were so well received that not only have you earned us tremendous good will with the community we serve, but, I believe, have elevated the standards for performance for the entire area. Bravo, indeed!

Finally, I also want to thank you for the three workshops you conducted in our area schools. The students were involved and excited and the teachers have informed us they were among the most successful ever held in the districts. Bless you for helping us look to the future of both the arts and our community.

I look forward to the time when we can repeat this experience.

Sincerely,

Steven Leon
Managing Director

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Community and Technical Services

Megan Yore
58900 Cherry Grove Road
Dowagiac, MI 49047

February 13, 1996

Terry Kippenberger
Mainstage Management
8144A Big Bend Blvd.
St. Louis, MO 63119

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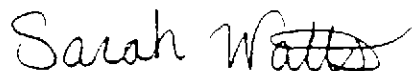
Dr. Michael Mauldin
c/o Southwest Missouri State University
English Department
901 S. National Ave.
Springfield, MO 65804

Dear Dr. Mauldin,

I am writing to thank you for being involved in English Week. It was a magnificent experience and I am thrilled that I got the chance to attend. I wanted to write you a letter, thanking you for your superb presentation on "Interpreting Shakespeare." The presentation was educational and entertaining. To combine these elements is very difficult and I appreciate the effort you put into it.

The students you selected also did a wonderful job, thanks to their director. You have a true talent with interpretation. I never realized that Romeo was not only head over heels for Juliet, but was also challenging her intellect. I have an even greater appreciation for the play, having gained the knowledge that you bestowed on myself and my friends. You did a wonderful job. I have never enjoyed learning about Shakespeare so much in my life.

Thank you again,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sarah Watts". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Sarah Watts

March 21, 2001

Dr. Michael Mauldin
SMSU English Department
901 S. National
Springfield, MO 65806

Dear Dr. Mauldin:

Thank you for the lecture you gave on Thursday March 15. I truly enjoyed it. I have been a fan of Shakespeare for many years. And I was able to see his works in a whole new light.

I have studied many of Shakespeare's works but Romeo and Juliet has always been my favorite. Because of your lecture I am now able to look at the story in a whole new light. I have currently begun rereading it so that I can look and see what else I can find.

I appreciate the time you took to lecture us, and I can promise you that the things you taught us have not gone unheeded. Thank you once again. I hope that I can get the chance to hear you speak some time in the future.

Sincerely,

Angela Cooper
Angela Cooper



University of Missouri-Columbia
College of Arts and Science
317 Lowry Hall
Columbia, MO 65211
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July 5, 2000

Professor Michael Mauldin
Dept. of Theatre
SMSU
Springfield, MO 65802

Dear Michael:

What can I possibly say that will convey my gratitude, and that of all MSA 2000 participants, for your splendid program. To the extent that MSA 2000 lived up in every way to the standard which our earlier Academies have established, we are in debt to people like you for taking time from other summer activities and responsibilities to be with us and for contributing so significantly to the Academy's success. Your performance and subsequent discussion were first-rate in every way. We all learned more than we possibly hoped to from your talent and your professionalism.

Hope you get some good time off this summer. Hope also that our paths cross some time this year.

Sincerely yours,



Theodore A. Tarkow
Co-Director

*The Missouri Scholars Academy—
A Commitment to Excellence*

Twain comes alive in performance

By SHARIE BRUNO
OF THE NORTHWESTERN

WAUTOMA — For one night at least, Mark Twain came alive in Wautoma.

Michael Mauldin, who is from the New York area and who could pass for Twain's double, performed twice Saturday night. Mauldin did a stand-up one man act, recreating Twain complete with white suit, shock of hair and mustache, and cigar.

Mauldin not only acted, he lived and breathed the part of Twain, writer and humorist. "Twain" introduced himself as one not adverse to paying himself a compliment. "I keep my compliment collection ready," he said.

"There are two men in the world most remarkable. Kipling is one; I'm the other. He knows all that can be

REVIEW

known and I know the rest," Twain said.

Twain then went on to expound on his various theories and philosophies of life. "I don't care for moderation myself. I can give up smoking entirely but I can't moderate it."

He discussed ways he earned a living. "I wasn't very particular about a job. I didn't want to work so I became a newspaper reporter. I hated to do it, but I often had to serve time this way," he said.

Twain gave his view on politicians. "I went to Washington to cover Congress — that grand old benevolent asylum for the helpless. I reported on the inmates there," he said.

"Politicians can talk for a week and never get rid of an

idea," he said.

He talked of the love of his life, Olivia, and their renowned courtship. "I met her, promptly fell in love with her, and two years later, married her. Now that sounds easy and uncomplicated; it wasn't. There were three or four proposals and just as many refusals," Twain said.

In later days, he turned to lecturing. "I began to lecture, and I haven't had to do a day's work since."

Twain discussed people in true curmudgeon style. "As you've probably noticed, the human race is a curiosity. Men started a little lower than the angels and gave been getting a little lower ever since. I wonder if God invented man because he was disappointed in the monkey."

Neither was the topic of religion off limits. "Man loves

his neighbor as himself and cuts his throat if his theology isn't straight."

Also he warned, "If you use morals too much during the week days, they'll be worn out by the Sabbath."

Twain said he didn't mind getting old — smoking, swearing and drinking two *had* scotches each night before bedtime to "prevent a toothache." "You cannot reach old age by any other man's road. You have to make your own set of rules and stick to them. If you can't make it to an old age by a comfortable road, don't go," he warned.

As for salvation, Twain said, "If they don't let me swear in heaven, I won't stay there."

The audience, who laughed throughout the performance, gave Twain a standing ovation.

Mauldin offers Twain with a humorous twang

Wagner
writer

Mauldin is an actor. Mark Twain was a writer. When you combine these two individuals, a character emerges victorious as he manages to outwit and dominate Mauldin. The actor becomes a witty old codger who saunters across his stage relating an incident in his wildly entertaining manner in silence while he conjures up another opinion to hurl at you.

Instantly his physical being, the many seem-ingly comfortable gestures, the usual back that is bent in the being of aging smokers, and the characteristics of the Hannibal, Missouri pur-veyor of pork have been studied, practiced and finely

he can instantly understand why it takes three hours to put on the make up. More than like-ly, the make-up time is also well used as a meditative period to enter fully into the world of the master

Mark Twain comes to us from an amazingly different time but it is remarkable that so many of his com-ments and discussion of politics, religion, the state of the union and human nature are as valid today as they were back when.

Mauldin has been living with this character for many years and during that time has devel-

oped enough material to do two or three perfor- mances. Therefore, each program is just a bit differ- ent depending on the mood of Mauldin and the pieces he feels a certain audience would most enjoy.

The programme, as it is called, gives you a page of possible selections to be used for that particular appearance. But you are also warned: "While Mr. Twain's selections will come from the list below, we have been unable to pin him down to a definite decision as to which of them he will be using. He claims this would cripple his inspiration. However, he has generously conceded to a printed programme for the benefit of those who are in distress and may wish to fan themselves."

The list included: The Dangers of Abstinence, Encounter with an Interviewer, Awful German Language, The German Opera, How I stole my Name, How to be Seventy, God and Man, Sandwich Islands and How to Give Up Smoking.

They were all deliciously comical but the

Encounter with an Interviewer was outrageously funny. He answers to the interviewers questions were given with humble sincerity, while steadfastly hold- ing to the conjured truth. But his answers were so totally off the walls and completely impossible in their context that the audi- ence whooped with laughter.

Had I been the interview- er, I would have immediately thrown away my pad and pencil and enjoyed his lunacy.

Mauldin is a master of the pause. He uses it often and always with most telling effect. He at times gets more from a single pause than a string of classic one-liners. He also has a twinkle in his eye that is all his own but at times you want to believe he has stolen it from Twain him- self.

These performances were sponsored by SunTrust Bank and given to benefit the Pirate Playhouse's new Artsreach program headed by Director Carrie Lund. It was a most auspicious kick- off. Watch for news of other artsreach programs that will be coming soon.

Mark Twain comes to us from an amazingly different time but it is remarkable that so many of his com-ments about and discus- sion of politics, religion, occupations, state of the union and human nature are as valid today as they were back when.