

# BLACKFRIARS



By SISTER MARY PIUS

A story begins twenty years ago with three handsome young bachelors with a dream of good timeless or timely, truly catholic theatre: Robert Smett, Robert Bride (still an occasional performer), and Ronald Pedrone (a very active participant and the most recent past president).

Their dream took the form of re-vamping an older theater group, Blackfriars, into a new acting company called Catholic Theatre of Rochester. "Catholic" in that many of the theatres used for performance were Catholic schools or church halls; and many of the early members were also Catholic.

Since that time, however, the group has been catholic in the sense of universal. About ten years ago, they reassumed the name Blackfriars.

An early custom was to tour with a Christmas vehicle such as Henri Gheon's "Christmas in the Village Square" to parishes during the holiday season in the manner of the guild touring companies of the middle ages.

Not having a permanent theatre was partly circumstantial (no money); and ultimately a positive decision. The result has been extremely beneficial to both audience and company. It has made the Blackfriars inventive and experimental and it has broadened their membership and their horizons.

Institutions of higher learning have also frequently hosted the Blackfriars production: Nazareth College (which has had the longest affiliation), St. John Fisher, and most recently, R.I.T.

The most recent new and excitingly experimental theatre used was the Strasenburg Planetarium for a production of "Galileo" last season. Over a hundred projectors were used to create scenery on the huge dome.

But more interesting than the theatres, of course, are the people. They are of all ages, faiths, professions, and backgrounds. Only occasionally are they full-time actors. A few have been associated for the entire twenty years. Many come and go. Every season there is new blood.

A look at some of the old-timers will indicate the kinds of people that the theatre bug has bitten. Carl Zollo, an artist, who is known locally for the handsome decor he has created in stores, banks and churches, is the most frequent scene man and program designer. On occasion Zollo acts as long as the character portrayed speaks no lines; hence, his acceptance of the role of the mute in the current production of "Fantastics."

Then, there's Wilford Scott who has worked with theatre groups since he was 16. Scott is head of the Purchasing Department of Security Trust, when he is not directing. Richard Mancini is the creator or the director of all the displays you see in Formans. For Blackfriars he is equally competent as actor or director or dancer or singer.