

Arts center celebrates 25 years of innovation

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — It began as a response to a practical need.

Nazareth College was suffering from overcrowded classrooms for its music and art students by the 1960s, so administrators decided that the East Avenue school needed a new building.

But what Nazareth erected was more than a building to house its art and music departments. The complex known as the Nazareth College Arts Center has touched in a special way both students and the people of the Rochester community.

The arts center currently is celebrating 25 years, during which more than two million people have witnessed a wide variety of innovative entertainment.

The stage of its 1,153-seat main theater has given Rochester audiences tastes of modern and international dance, including performances by the Alvin Ailey dancers, the National Dance Troupe of Senegal, the Jose Greco Flamingo dancers and Rochester's own Garth Fagan Dance.

The stage has been graced by such performers as Joan Baez, Kevin Kline, Arlo Guthrie, Vincent Price and Rafi.

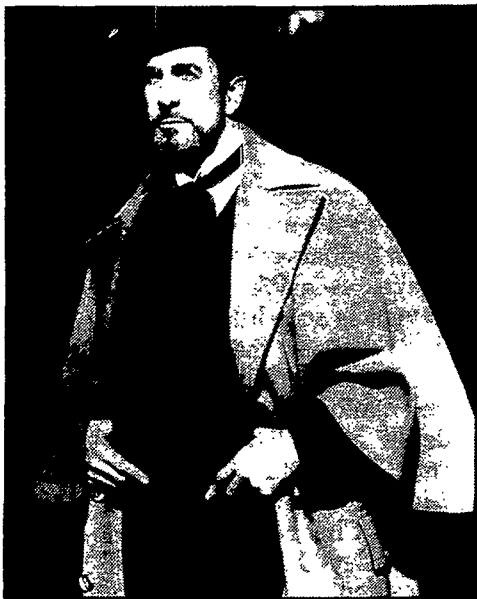
Mummenschanz, the internationally known mime troupe, made its U.S. debut at the arts center.

In the days before GeVa Theater was founded, Nazareth's arts center offered professional theater from the Shaw Festival and the Acting Company. Local children's theater got its start at

the arts center as well.

"The breadth of what we have to offer is consistently different than what other places offer (in Rochester)," noted David Ferrell, the arts center's director. "We've been experimental. Because of our size, we bring in things that might not work in other places."

On Oct. 17, the college will celebrate the center's anniversary with a reception and performance by Brenda Bufalino and the American Tap Dance Orchestra. The celebration will continue with a Feb. 9, 1993, lecture by Jonathan Miller, who will talk about "The Afterlife of the Play: Interpretations of the Classics in the 21st Cen-



Nazareth College Arts Center
Vincent Price is among the many famous performers who have graced the center's stage.



Nazareth College Arts Center
The Boys Choir of Harlem is scheduled to perform at the center during its 25th-anniversary season.



Nazareth College Arts Center
Mummenschanz, the renowned mime troupe, made its U.S. debut at the Nazareth Arts Center.

tury."

Other performances scheduled for the 25th-anniversary season include Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado*; Tommy Makem; the Boys Choir of Harlem; Garth Fagan Dance; Lynn Redgrave performing *Shakespeare for my Father*, a tribute to her father, Sir Michael Redgrave; and Mummenschanz.

During its Oct. 22 annual luncheon, Arts for Greater Rochester is scheduled to present the college with an award honoring the center's contribution to the arts in Monroe County.

"We've tried to fill a vacuum in the performance niche in the Rochester community," observed the college's president, Rose Marie Beston. "The center adds the kind of performances that are not being done at the Eastman Theater or one of the theaters like GeVa."

Beston said that the college's administration — and the Sisters of St. Joseph who founded it — were so committed to creating such a facility that they built it "at a time when the college didn't have a lot of resources."

Indeed, they financed construction of the center largely with loans, and with money raised from students and supporters of the college, Beston added, pointing out that the college finally paid off those loans just two years ago. And the college continues to subsidize

the center, she pointed out.

One feature of the arts center that fills a need in the community is the size of its main theater, explained Joseph Baranowski, who has served as the center's director of programming throughout its 25 years.

The Rochester area has large theaters to attract major acts, and small theaters for local productions, but the arts center offers a medium-sized facility that could accommodate innovative but often lesser-known performers.

"What the (arts center) allowed was the possibility of bringing to Rochester events that would never be brought to Rochester without this facility," Baranowski said.

The center, which also includes two smaller performance areas as well as spaces for art exhibits, is also used by community groups, Baranowski noted. Thus children's theater groups, touring companies and local dance schools all rent the facility.

Although the center has attracted attention for its services to the community, its primary goal remains the education of Nazareth students, Ferrell observed.

"We value the exposure that our students get when they come in," Ferrell explained. "We try to get the message out to the students that you will not get to see these acts for free again."

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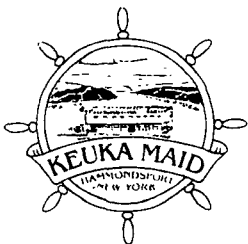
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