

# A 'Wilde' celebration planned for local theater community



~ Oscar Wilde

By BTL STAFF

What do you get when you mix a little wine and some tasty munchies with a fabulous female impersonator and a dozen theatrical awards? We're not quite sure either, but it's safe to assume that Oscar Wilde would surely be pleased!

The glbt community's inaugural salute to theatrical excellence - The Wilde Awards - takes place next Monday, and like the Awards' namesake, the evening promises to be anything but conventional!

Created to acknowledge the excellent work staged this past season by Michigan's professional theaters, The Wilde Awards will be given out at a fun-filled ceremony to be held on Aug. 26 at the Furniture Factory in Detroit. The event is sponsored by Between The Lines.

Why BTL is supporting such a venture is really quite simple, according to co-publisher and editor-in-chief Susan Horowitz. "Lesbians and gays are big supporters of the arts. As a subculture, we've always embraced the arts. The arts are a place where we can put our lives in front of a wide range of people who might otherwise not see them. Theatre in particular can help us educate the world in a less threatening, less dogmatic, yet very entertaining way.

"Plus, where would theatre be without the talents of its gay and lesbian artists?" she laughed.

Having a newspaper sponsor such an event is not unusual, according to BTL theater critic and Wilde

Awards creator Donald V. Calamia. The difference is the approach.

"As Oscar Wilde was unique and colorful, so too are the awards that are named after him," Calamia said. "Everything about the Wilde Awards is different from what's been done before, from how we determine who the winners are to the awards ceremony itself. Even the award that we hand to the winners can be different from one person to the next. People in the 19th century never knew what to expect next from Oscar Wilde, and we're attempting to recreate that same feeling with the Wilde Awards."

Mainstream newspapers throughout the state each have their own traditions when it comes to handing out their much-respected theater awards. They all have one thing in common, however: their winners are determined by a select group of critics and journalists. Not so with the Wilde Awards.

"BTL's publishers and I wanted our awards to be different," Calamia stated. "We want our awards to come from the entire glbt community, not just one individual or group. And we figured out a way to make that work."

A ballot containing nine "best of" categories - as determined by critic Calamia - appeared in four consecutive issues of Between The Lines this past spring. Readers were encouraged to fill out the ballot and return it to the paper by July 1. Ballots were also available at the BTL booth at Motor City Pride.

Almost immediately, the ballots  
*Please see, WILDE CELEBRATION,*  
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~ Don Calamia,

Between The Lines reviewer  
and Wilde Awards creator

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came charging in!

"Response to the balloting was surprisingly good for a first time venture," Calamia said. "It was fascinating to discover which shows and performers the glbt community responded to best. There were a couple of very close races, and two were ultimately decided by the very last ballot counted!"

Three additional awards - not part of the balloting - will also be given out at the ceremony: The Publisher's Award for Excellence, the Critic's Choice Award and the Community Pride Award.

According to Horowitz, these additional awards serve a very specific purpose. "When theater companies or individual artists take on causes that are of special interest to our community, either directly or indirectly, they deserve to be acknowledged for it. We need to let them know we appreciate their efforts on our behalf. And as a result of their example, we hope others will take a risk and join them in using the arts to accomplish a greater good, as well."

Although many details surrounding the awards ceremony are being kept under wraps, Horowitz and

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~ Susan Horowitz, Between The Lines co-publisher

Calamia promise attendees a very exciting - and unique - experience. "How can it be otherwise, when the co-host for the evening will be the ever-lovely and always-charming Serenna Escevelle!"

That alone will make the awards ceremonies sponsored by the Detroit Free Press, the Oakland Press and the Ann Arbor News look tame by comparison!

The evening starts promptly at 7 p.m. with hors d'oeuvres provided by the Majestic Café, wine donated by the Human Rights Campaign Fund and special entertainment. The Wilde Awards ceremony is scheduled to begin at 8 p.m.

Door prizes generously donated

by The Bonstelle, Century, Gem and Hilberry Theatres will be given out throughout the evening.

Guests are encouraged to attend dressed in a manner befitting the late, great - and oh, so gay - Irish playwright. "Oscar Wilde was known for wearing a velvet coat edged with braid, knee breeches, black silk stockings, a soft loose shirt with wide low turned-down collar, and his trademarked pale green tie and carnation. But if it's a hot night, shorts and Hawaiian shirts would work, too," Calamia chuckled.

**Admittance to the event is by invitation only. However, readers interested in attending should call Matt Barton at (248) 615-7003 by no later than August 23.**



The lovely Serenna Escevelle will co-host the first annual Wilde Awards.