

FRIDAY PRIMETIME/LATE NIGHT NOVEMBER 8, 2013. Table listing broadcast and cable stations with their respective programs and times.

Bee

From Page 1B

and attended East High School.

The two freshmen are no strangers to the stage, performing with Lamb Theater in Sioux City and in other local shows. They have acted together in the Lamb Theater production of "Camp Rock."

Turner said she was excited to learn MMC was performing "Bee" during her first semester on campus and that she was cast as Olive Ostrovsky.

"This is one of my favorite musicals. I have seen it performed at Morningside College (in Sioux City) during their outdoor theater in the summer," she said. "I cried when I heard that we were doing it this fall at Mount Marty. I have always wanted to be Olive in the show."

The role of Olive represents a complex character, Turner said.

"Olive is a shy girl who isn't getting a lot of attention from her parents. Her mother is on a nine-month quest in India, and her father is angry and frustrated because her mother is gone so long," Turner said.

"Olive really doesn't have friends at school, so she spends most of her time reading from the dictionary. She has a love for language and words and spelling. She wants to show her father, 'Look, I can do special things! Be part of my life!'"

Olive remains on stage throughout the show, Turner said. "It's one of the biggest roles that I've ever had. It can be a bit tiring," she explained.

When it comes to his role, Danner calls himself "type-cast." He draws on his own personal experiences shared with his character, Leaf Conebear. On the other hand, Conebear holds his own unique story, Danner said.

"He's different and comes from a large family. He doesn't have bad parents, but they don't expect anything but outstanding children," Danner explained. "He wants them to know that he's unique and outstanding for it."

Both Danner and Turner say the MMC production represents one of the smallest casts but one of the largest tech crews that they have experienced. The smaller cast and solo singing roles promote a more intimate feeling and sense of teamwork but also more pressure on each actor, they said.

In addition, Danner and Turner noted they have more preparation and rehearsal time than some of their past productions, which worked on a compressed schedule.

The MMC freshmen duo also praised Marian Auditorium with its large stage and its seating for an audience of about 600. They look forward to the upcoming run of "Bee" to kick off their college acting careers.

"I'm nervous and excited. I'm looking forward to the audience reaction," Danner said.

Turner agreed, adding she anticipates drawing off that nervousness when she gets on stage.

"You never know how the audience will react. There is an awareness of your audience that gives you energy," she said. "This is one of the most emotional plays that I've been in. I'm excited for the challenge."

Cast members for Bee include Tessa Carda, Armour, as Rona Lisa Peretti; Ryan Oye, Luverne, Minn., as Douglas Panch; and Nathan Porras, Crofton, Neb., as Mitch M. Mahoney; with "Spellers" Gage Blaschke, Sioux Falls, as Chip Tolentino; Molly Henrickson, Yankton, as Logan SchwartzandGrubenierre; Billy Danner, North Sioux City, as Leaf Conebear; Jacob Fokken, Yankton, as William Barfee; Johanna Scheich, Mitchell, as Marcy Park; and Abby Turner, Sioux City, as Olive Ostrovsky.

Also working with the production are Ken Tice as music director, Jim Hovland as technical director, Dawn Ferris as costume director, Kathryn Reimler as choreographer and Catherine Pratt as stage manager.

Tickets are on sale in the MMC Theatre box office, located in the upper level of the Roncalli building. Tickets can also be reserved by calling (605) 668-1234 from noon to 5 p.m. weekdays.

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'12 Years A Slave' A Searing Exploration Of A Brutal History

BY RENE RODRIGUEZ

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MIAMI — At the start of "12 Years a Slave," a nonfiction account of his experiences as a slave published in 1853, Solomon Northrup expressed pleasure at the burgeoning number of books, newspaper articles and other writings that had started to sprout alongside his own memoir.

"Since my return to liberty, I have not failed to perceive the increasing interest throughout the Northern States, in regard to the subject of Slavery," Northrup wrote. "Works of fiction, professing to portray its features in their more pleasing as well as more repugnant aspects, have been circulated to an extent unprecedented, and, as I understand, have created a fruitful topic of comment and discussion."

But 160 years later, movies remain reluctant to confront the subject. Aside from the seminal 1977 TV miniseries "Roots," slavery has been relegated to background and subplots in the vast majority of filmed entertainments set during the early years of American history. "Amistad" took the true story of a savage mutiny aboard a ship transporting African slaves to America and turned it into a courtroom drama in which famous white actors argued about the definition of freedom. In most Civil War-era movies, black actors are either supporting players, doomed soldiers or victims waiting to be rescued. Quentin Tarantino's "Django Unchained," which spared no detail in its depiction of the brutality of slavery, kept its main protagonist on the sidelines for almost half the movie.

And even when the great Gordon Parks ("Shaft") adapted Northrup's book for an episode of PBS' "American Playhouse" in 1984, the memoir was condensed into a half hour special suitable for viewing in elementary school classrooms.

One of the most bracing things about "12 Years a Slave" is the head-on approach director Steve McQueen and screenwriter John Ridley take to the material. There is no hand-holding, no comforting, no soothing musical score to heighten the sorrow and wring empathetic tears. The movie's combination of clinical brusqueness and unexpected moments of dark, poetic beauty is unlike anything you've seen before. Solomon (played by Chiwetel Ejiofor) was a free man in Saratoga, N.Y., in 1841 with a wife and two children. He made a comfortable living as a musician. And then, over the course of a single night of too much wine, he wakes up in a dark, dank room, shackled and terrified and alone.

"You ain't a free man," one of his captors tells him. "You're a Georgia runaway."

For the next 12 torturous years, Solomon will be stripped of his identity (Paul Giamatti plays a slave trader who re-names him Platt), his dignity and, of course, his freedom. The film recounts Solomon's experiences as he's sold off like prized livestock to various plantation owners. None is more vicious or cruel than Epps (Michael Fassbender), a cotton farmer with a wife, Mary (Sarah Paulson), whose hateful stare reveals her sadism and disdain.

But one of the great things about "12 Years a Slave" is that the movie refuses to paint any of its characters in broad strokes: Rendering Epps and Mary as simply evil would undercut the film's tremendous power. McQueen doesn't want to make us suffer, because that's easy to shrug off and leave behind at the theater. Instead, he wants to make us see and feel and try to understand.

"I had the idea of a free man who was kidnapped and brought into slavery," the director says. "My wife (cultural critic Bianca Stigter) suggested Solomon's book. I had never even heard of it. It was amazing — a biography of America, a first-hand account of what was going on then. It practically read like a script. And I liked the way the book explored slavery as an economic system. I didn't want to portray slavery in black and white. It was immensely more complicated than that. Lines were blurred. It wasn't as straightforward as we tend to think about it."

Solomon's refusal to give up hope — unlike some of his fellow slaves — anchors the film in a deep humanity. "I don't want to survive," he says. "I want to live." Although the audience knows Solomon will live long enough to be freed and reunited with his family, he believes he could be killed at any moment for the slightest transgression. Early in the film, when he rises up against a farmhand (Paul Dano) who torments him one time too many, the moment is incredibly cathartic — finally, a chance to fight back — but it also fills you with dread, because you know Solomon will be gravely punished for what he has done.

"The slaves knew what would happen to them if they rebelled, but sometimes they couldn't help themselves," McQueen says. "There was a huge slave revolt in Louisiana in 1811, before Solomon got there. They took arms against their plantation owner and killed his son. Eventually, more than 100 slaves were killed. They were caught and tortured and decapitated. Every head was put on a pole and placed outside each of the slave shacks as a kind of warning. The constant threat of fear and reprisal was a part of their everyday lives."

That emotional head space was something that took awhile for Ejiofor to inhabit, because the extremity of it has no counterpart in his everyday life.

"When I read the script, I was stunned by it, because it told the story from inside the character's head," the actor says. "It took me a moment to get my head around it and dive in. But as soon as I committed to the project and stepped in front of the camera, I started to understand Solomon and how he thought. I felt something profound. It became a privilege to go on that journey, to get down to Louisiana and those plantations and out in those fields and recreate what actually happened there. I stopped thinking about the camera at all. I was living moment to moment, like Solomon did. I felt like I had scurried down this rabbit hole and was stuck in the darkest of fairy tales."

Just as remarkable as Ejiofor's performance is the portrayal by Fassbender of the

maniacal Epps, a monster far more complex than anything the Grimm Brothers ever dreamed up.

"Epps is psychotic, for sure, but there are various elements to his sickness," says Fassbender, who previously worked with McQueen on "Hunger" and "Shame." "He's a plantation owner obsessed with being on top of it all, so there isn't a day that goes by where the slaves are working on the field and he isn't watching them. On the one day of the week when they're off, he can't be without them. He goes into the slave quarters and drags them into the main house to play music and dance with them. He has a dependency on them that goes beyond economics: He has an emotional connection with them, too."

"His relationship with Solomon is more complicated. He's threatened by Solomon, even though he can't put his finger on it. He suspects Solomon is a much higher intellect than him, so he tries to destroy Patsey (Lupita Nyong'o), a young slave Solomon has befriended. That is Epps' way of trying to get over his insecurities. But he only ends up intensifying it."

Fassbender credits McQueen for populating "12 Years a Slave" with characters both big and small that are all fully realized (Alfre Woodard appears in one scene as a slave who has learned to work the system to her advantage, and her performance is so strong, she merits her own movie).

"Steve has such a good understanding of the human condition," Fassbender says. "He has great hope in it and a great fear of the reality of it. When you walk onto his set, there's no time for (B.S.) or hanging out or playing games. It's time to search for the truth of how frail we are as human beings. And he never judges any of his characters, good or evil. He loved the idea that (Solomon) could retain his sense of love even after this incredible ordeal. When he is reunited with his family, the first thing he says to them is 'Forgive me.' That line is crushing, because you see the dignity and integrity of this man."

Edmund Abaka, Ph.D., an associate professor of history at the University of Miami, says the release of "12 Years a Slave" may be the instigator for a cultural conversation about a chapter in history that is still not yet fully explored in high-school history classes, because it is too unpleasant and ugly, and it's too shameful to remember that this was once the face of America.

"That sentiment is still alive and well," Abaka says. "It happened so long ago. Now we have a black president. Why should we even worry about that? Let's get over it! But the slavery era is deeply woven into the fabric of the African-American experience. The resilience of the people who survived and resisted and forged new identities and cultures and music is extraordinary. The violence is one side of it. But another side is the complexity of the individuals. Some slaves killed themselves so they didn't have to suffer. Some struggled through it to provide for their families. Fathers did whatever they could do to