

Steppin' Out

An entertaining teacher



MARCI AND MICHAEL FICOELLI

By PEGGY QUINLAN

When Cole Porter wrote "Night and Day," he could have been describing the dual career of Michael Ficoelli of Bloomingdale. During the day, Michael is the much-admired music teacher at the Richard E. Byrd School in Glen Rock. But in the evening, Michael and his wife, Marci, entertain at cabarets and lounges throughout the tri-state area. Successful in their field, they are booked through the end of 1990, and are presently appearing at the Woodcliff Lake Hilton Inn, where they will perform until the end of June, and then throughout the months of August and September.

As a teacher, Michael enjoys helping children learn the basics of music, and his enthusiasm is catching. For the past three years, Michael has staged an end-of-year event that children in the fourth, fifth and sixth grades spend several months rehearsing. One year, Michael wrote a musical called "The Fall of Freddie the Leaf," based on a short story by Leo Buscaglia, and last year produced an original musical called "Wild Imaging," the story of two teenagers who pursue musical careers, but one is held back by lack of musical knowledge. Michael felt that the show demonstrated the importance of not only being musically talented, but of possessing a general knowledge, such as how to read music, its history, etc. This past May, he designed an anthology of music titled (A Classic Evening of Story Telling Through Song) which included everything from Broadway to opera. "It's great fun helping the children to experience all kinds of music," says Michael, "but I really couldn't do it without Marci. She does a lot of the staging and choreography and really makes it work."

The parents of two small children, Barbara 3 and Eric Michael 6 months, Marci and Michael regularly juggle child care and their careers. Both received their masters degrees in music education from the University of Bridgeport and Michael has written and published five songs. "Writing is probably my first love," says Michael. "I guess my ultimate goal would be to write a Broadway show, a la Stephen Sondheim. Of course, one hit song would be great, algo." Marci's ultimate goal, naturally, is to star in a Stephen Sondheim (or Michael Ficoelli) musical!

One reason Michael is so encouraging to younger children is because he discovered his love of music at an early age. "I was around 9 years old when my parents came into a piano. I was not hooked on anything in particular, but when I started lessons, I never ever thought 'I don't like this.' I knew right away that I would always enjoy this, and could probably be pretty good at it." Marci recalls that she, too, discovered her musical ability at a young age. "I'd listen to my father's Streisand albums, and sing along with her, and watch my reflection in the television set. I loved performing then — and I still love it."

And perform is what they get to do on a regular basis now, including such hot spots as Trump's Castle in Atlantic City, and as the opening act for comedienne Elayne Boosier at the Bitter End in New York.

But teaching has great rewards also, like watching children recognize the work of certain composers, or discover a talent for a certain instrument. So while Michael is imparting his love of music to these children at Byrd School, they are sure that one day they'll see their elementary school teacher's name up in lights on Broadway!