

Oklahoma! Concludes 2005-2006 Season

By John Lieder

There's déjà vu and plenty new in store in the upcoming Community Players' production of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *Oklahoma!* This marks the third time that *Oklahoma!* has been produced at Community Players. Players' historian **Bruce Parrish** has played the role of farmer Andrew Carnes in all three productions. Similarly, yours truly reprises the role of rancher Ike Skidmore from the 1989 production.

Alan Wilson, who played Ali Hakim in the 1989 production, is in the ensemble this time around. The set design was adapted from the 1989 design by **Kerry Dixon-Fox**. In homage to Kerry a picture of her from the 1989 production hangs in Jud Fry's smokehouse.



Farmer and Cowboy Bruce Parrish and Blair A'Hearn square off while Kindra Rathbun, Kip Hayden, Erin Moll, Jason Strunk and Matt Strohn look on (from left to right).

On the other hand, the two young romantic leads, **Becky Murphy** as Laurey and **Kip Hayden Jr.** as Curly, are among a host of actors making their Community Players debuts. Joining Becky and Kip in their debuts are **Erin Moll** as Ado Annie, **Brett Cottone** as Ali Hakim as well as ensemble performers **Charles Andrews**, **Fred Render**, **Kamryn Dobbins**, **Marcie James**, **Erik Lehmkuhl**, and **David Vilmin**. In addition, music directors **Kip** and **Peg Hayden** are new to Community Players along with rehearsal accompanist **Angie Shwab**. Although **Dorothy Mundy** and **Lisa Cable** are certainly not new to Community Players, *Oklahoma!* marks their first gig as producers.

Rounding out the principal roles are **Christie Velella** as Aunt Eller, **Blair A'Hearn** as Will Parker, **Nathan Bottorff** as Jud Fry and **Aimee Kerber** as Gertie Cummins.



The set design, built by **Jeremy Stiller** and **Bruce Parrish**, consists of a three-way, spinning platform which serves as Aunt Eller's porch, Ike Skidmore's barn and Jud's smoke house. Apart from a wagon, a fence, an old-fashioned pump and a few boxes and benches, the stage is left open for the large choral and dance numbers.

The ever-patient **Susan Wiggins** is choreographer. (She can even teach me to dance!) **Edie Arteman** and **Carolyn Beyer** are doing the costume design, **Mark Wright** is doing the lighting, **Rich Plotkin** is doing the sound design with help from **Cris Embree**, **Sherri Scott** is handling properties and **Judy Stroh** is stage manager. **Jean Lieder** will be greeting you at the door as house manager.

Because the show requires such a large cast, director **Penny Wilson** had to do some scrounging for actors. She has rounded up a passel of energetic performers with some lovely voices and is grooming what promises to be an exciting production of this marvelous piece of Americana. And, as is not at all uncommon around here, there have been some budding romances among the cast members. Ah, young love! It's what *Oklahoma!* is all about.

The Preview pay-what-you-can performance is Thursday, May 4, at 7:30. Regular performances are May 5 – 7, 11 – 14 and 18 – 21. Thursday evening performances are at 7:30, Sunday matinees begin at 2:30 and Friday and Saturday performances are at 8:00.

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COMMUNITY PLAYERS
Calendar

May - June 2006

Board Meetings

May 9, 6:00 p.m.
June 13, 6:00 p.m.
Community Players Theatre

Oklahoma!

Preview: May 4
Shows: May 5-7, 11-14 and 18-21.
Community Players Theatre

Beauty and the Beast

Auditions:
May 8, 9 (children),
May 15-17 (adults)



Community Players

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Newsletter Committee

Jim Kalmbach
John Lieder
Bob McLaughlin
Joann Yant

We are always looking for writers, artists, designers and story ideas.

Send comments and suggestions to lieder78@yahoo.com

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST Auditions

"Tale as old as time...." is indeed appropriate for the famous fairy tale, *Beauty and the Beast*. The true beauty of the story is that true love will prevail. Disney brought its first theatrical musical to the stage in 1994 and it is still running on Broadway, making it the sixth longest running show in Broadway history. Nominated for nine Tony awards, including Best Musical, Community Players is bringing this delightful show appropriate for audiences of all ages to Bloomington-Normal in July of 2006.



Auditions for this show are just around the corner, with auditions for the 7 available children's roles (ages 8 – 15) made **BY APPOINTMENT ONLY** (309-821-9421 to schedule a time) on Monday, May 8th or Tuesday, May 9th.

Adult auditions (ages 16+) will be Monday – Wednesday, May 15 – 17, 2006 beginning at 7 p.m. There are 15 men and 16 women roles available. For all auditions, performers are asked to be prepared to sing 16 – 24 bars of a song of their choice. Bring your own sheet music. An accompanist will be provided. No tapes, CD's or a capella permitted. Auditioners will also be asked to read a scene from the script. Adults will be asked to participate in a dance audition.

The director for the show is **Jason Wiggins**, the musical director is **Melody Palm**, and the producer is **Deb Smith**.

Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* is scheduled for a Pay What You Can Preview performance on July 13th with regular performances July 14 – 16, 20 – 23, and 27 – 30, 2006. Additional information can be found at the Community Players website: http://www.communityplayers.org/audition_beauty.html



A Season for Change Brochures

As a Community Players' member, you should have recently received a copy of our 2006/7 season brochure in the mail.

Much thanks to Cathy Sutcliffe, Thom Rakeshaw, who did a wonderful job designing the brochure, and Ted and Joan Ichniowski who prepared the mailing.

If you did not receive a copy of the brochure, please contact the box office at 663-2121.

Website Changes

Don't forget to check out the Community Players' website this May.

<http://www.communityplayers.org>

We will be updating the site with all the latest information on shows, events and news. And look for the newest feature: books and CDs available for each of our productions.

Membership Renewal

It's time to renew your membership with Community Players Theatre!

Your involvement in and support of Community Players is the most valuable asset we have. Over the past year we have loved providing you with breaking news, great travel opportunities, and behind-the-scenes peeks.

We have even more fantastic plans for 2006-2007, and it wouldn't be the same without you (if you know me, you know I mean that).

Please fill out the form included with this newsletter and return it addressed to the Membership Chair. Dues are still \$10 per person; those dues go towards membership programming. Questions? Contact me (Joann) at hstry95@yahoo.com until June 1st, 2006



Board Spotlight

[Editor's note: This is the second in a series of articles highlighting positions on the Board of Governors.]

Play Reading Chair

by John Lieder

In the last couple of issues, we have discussed the announcement of the 2006-2007 season and the assignment of directors and producers for those productions. Elsewhere in this issue we announce the availability of the brochures for the 2006-2007 season. All of these activities are the result of the work of the Play Reading Chairperson. Last summer, Bruce Parrish was named as the Play Reading Chair to fill out the term of Stuart Cartwright, who had moved to the Chicago area. I recently met with Bruce and chairperson-elect, Sally Parry, to discuss the play selection process and the other activities of the Play Reading Committee.

Preliminary Activities

The process begins in late summer when the chairperson organizes the Play Reading Committee. Ironically, this occurs about the same time that auditions are taking place for the first show of the most recently selected season. The committee includes four ex officio members: The Box Office



Sally Parry, the new chair of the Play Reading Committee discusses the play selection process with Bruce Parrish, past chair.

Chair, Theatre Tech Chair, Theatre Craft Chair, and the Vice President. Other voting members may be added at the discretion of the Chair. Parrish noted that it is a good idea to have an odd number of members on the committee in case the selection process comes down to a vote.

After the committee is organized, the Chair asks for play (and musical) nominations from the committee members. The Chair then arranges to have copies available for the members to read. Along with plays nominated by the committee, plays given strong consideration in prior years but not selected

may also be considered. This past season about 20 plays and musicals were read by the Committee.

Individual Play Considerations

While reading the plays, the members are asked to analyze them based upon several factors. The only solid (but still unwritten) guideline is the 10-year rule: No play should be selected that has been performed at Community Players within the last ten years. In addition, the members must consider...

- The quality of the literature. (Is it well written?)
- Is it doable within the constraints of our theatre? (For this, expertise of the Theatre Crafts and Theatre Arts chairpersons and other board members is extremely valuable.)
- Will people come to see it? (Has it been done too recently by another theatre in the area? Does it have mass appeal? Is it well known?)
- Is it "risky"? (Does it contain material that may be offensive to some of our regular clientele?)

Collective Considerations

Along with considerations regarding each nominated play, the committee must consider the constraints and requirements of the season. Although the number and types of plays making up the season are subject to change, recently the following formula has been followed by the Play Reading Committee:

- A comedy, usually in the fall
- A little (lesser known) musical, usually in the fall
- A comedy/drama or mystery, usually in the winter
- A drama, usually in the winter
- A big musical, usually in May

The committee also weighs the male-female cast requirements, attempting to select seasons not heavily dominated by one gender.

One piece of the formula that changes from time to time is the number of musicals versus plays. Although musicals tend to have higher attendance, they are more expensive to produce and therefore don't necessarily make more money. Also, under continual consideration by the Committee and

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... **Play Reading Committee continued from page 3.**

the Board is the number of performances of each show. In the future, consideration may be given to only doing two weekends of a show that isn't expected to draw as big a crowd.

Selecting the Season

As the plays are analyzed by the committee, some are eventually culled for one reason or another. The plays remaining under consideration are then discussed in depth. During this process, although not a requirement, the committee will likely consider a theme for the season, which may be suggested by the plays under consideration. A play may be culled simply because it does not fit into the theme. The Committee comes to a consensus as to the plays selected for the season and announces the slate, including performance and audition dates, at a meeting of the Board of Governors. The Board must ultimately approve the slate of shows, usually at the December meeting.

Everyone wants to know what plays are being considered for the next season, but the process needs to be relatively secretive, since changes are possible even at the last minute. In fact, Parrish shared that false seasons have been leaked in the past to assure secrecy regarding the actual shows under consideration.

Preparing for the New Season

The work of the Committee does not stop with the approval of the season by the Board of Governors. It is the responsibility of the Committee to staff directors and

producers for the next season. After the December meeting, the Chair will solicit directors and producers (and possibly other staff) via a letter announcing the season. Those interested will fill out a form designating their preferences and qualifications and return same to the Chair. After the deadline for return of the forms has passed, the Committee meets to choose staff and calls the applicants to confirm their selection.

The Chair is also responsible for securing performance rights to the shows. The Chair works with the Treasurer on this, since the Treasurer must make the payment for performance rights. Securing rights is not necessarily a slam-dunk. In fact, recently Players has had to consider alternative shows because rights to *Chicago* and *Oklahoma!* were not immediately granted by the publisher.

The Committee provides synopses of the shows to the Marketing Chair to include in the season brochure. Toward the end of May, the Chair will meet with the directors and producers for the next season and distribute production manuals.

The Cycle Continues

With the 2005-2006 season finishing up with *Oklahoma!* next month and the 2006-2007 season about to begin, it won't be long before Sally starts the process over again. If you have a show to recommend for next season, you may contact Sally at separry@ilstu.edu.

Community Players Member Hits Broadway

by Bob McLaughlin

I imagine that all of us who do community theater have dreamed of being connected with a Broadway show. Well, one of our Community Players family has turned that dream into a reality.

A few weeks ago, Sally Parry and I attended one of the first preview performances of a new Broadway musical, *The Drowsy Chaperone*, at the Marquis Theatre. As we leafed through our Playbills, waiting for the show to start, Sally was the first to notice among the bios one Mariano Tolentino, Associate Producer! Yes, our Mariano Tolentino, with whom we've done so many shows (*My Fair Lady*, *1776*, *How to Succeed... Man of La Mancha*, *Stalag 17*) right here in Bloomington! How could this be? Why didn't we know about this? Could he have

gotten us better seats? Do we look funny with our mouths hanging open?

We were stunned, but not so much so that we weren't immediately enchanted by the play. It begins with a man sitting alone in his dreary apartment, telling the audience about his favorite musicals. His very favorite, he says, is the 1920s classic *The Drowsy Chaperone*. What? You've never heard of it? He then proceeds to play us the cast recording, and as he does, the play comes alive right in his apartment.

I don't know what the *New York Times* will say, but Bob and Sally give it two thumbs way up. The songs are clever pastiches of twenties-era show tunes, the dancing is terrific, the cast (including Sutton Foster

and Georgia Engel) is amazing, and—most important—this show is laugh-so-hard-that-tears-run-down-your-cheeks-and-your-side-cramps funny.

Future newsletters will feature reports from Mariano and the lucky ducks who are going to opening night, but in the meantime, if you're going to New York, do yourself (and Mariano) a favor and get tickets to *The Drowsy Chaperone*. To learn more about the show and to read Mariano's bio, go to <http://www.drowsychaperone.com/>.

