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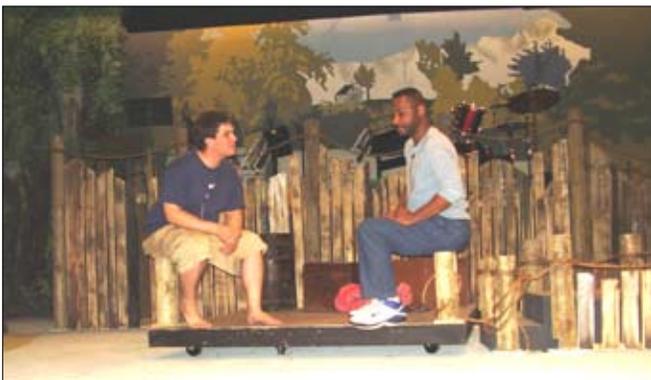
## Big River Big on Music and Fun

By John Lieder

Roger Miller is remembered for his novelty songs like “Chug-a-lug”, “Engine, Engine No. 9”, “You Can’t Roller Skate in a Buffalo Herd”, “England Swings” and, of course, his signature song “King of the Road”. However, along with 11 Grammy Awards, he also won the 1985 Tony Award for the music and lyrics of *Big River*, Community Players’ next production. Miller’s folksy, fun style lends itself well to this musical telling of Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and the cast is having much fun learning, performing and listening to each other sing these delightful songs.

Big River is chock full of delightful songs, ranging from the silly to the inspirational to the profound. If there is one flaw with the show, it’s that there are not enough big production numbers. This cast makes up for that with a hearty rendering of the reprise to “Muddy Water” during bows. It’s definitely worth the wait.

**Matt Surgot** as Huck and **Ronnie Jones** as the runaway slave Jim are the workhorses of this production. Jones, who played Joe and sang “Ol’ Man River” in the 2002 CP production of *Show Boat*, has a rich, polished baritone voice that is worth the price of admission.



Matt Sergot and Ron Jones rehearse a scene from *Big River* on the raft.

However, Surgot is certainly no slouch and his duets with Jones promise to be highlights of this production.

Joining Surgot and Jones is a musically talented cast, featuring **Brian Artman** as The Duke, **John Lieder** as The King, **Dave Lemmon** as Pap, **Jason Strunk** as Tom Sawyer, **Liesl Miller** as Mary Jane Wilkes, **Bev Collins** as The Strange Woman, **Deb Smith** as Widow Douglas and newcomer **Emily Taylor** as Miss Watson. **Bruce Parrish** appears at the opening as Mark Twain and returns in the second act as The Doctor. (Actually, all the cast members excluding Surgot and Jones, have multiple roles.) Others making their Community Players’ debuts are **Carthy Dixon**, **Mallory Sims**, **Aaron Sompong**, **Allen Walker**, **Careshmeh Lowes**, and **Adam Vilmin**. Rounding out the cast are **Charles Andrews**, **Jaron Rhoda**, **Charles Maaks**, **Amanda McDermeit**, **Eli** and **Zoe Mundy**, **Jennifer Rusk**, **Laura Walsh**, and **John Walther**.

The set has been constructed by **Bruce Parrish** with special design, construction assistance, and artwork by **Kerry Dixon-Fox**. Kerry (who now lives in Iowa) worked and performed with CP in several productions in the 90’s and served on the Board of Governors. She has made a special trip from Iowa to help get this production ready.

The set includes an upstage platform for the orchestra, descending platforms leading to a dock, and, of course, Huck’s raft. The town scenes are performed in front of

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May - June 2007

**Board Meetings**

May 8, 6:00 p.m.  
June 12, 6:00 p.m.  
Community Players Theatre

**Big River**

Pay-what-you-can: May 9  
Shows: May 4-6, 10-13, 17-20

**Joseph**

Auditions: May 19, 21, 22, 23  
Pay-what-you-can: July 12  
Shows: July 13-15, 19-22, 26-29.

Tickets can be ordered on line at  
[www.communityplayers.org](http://www.communityplayers.org).

Click on "Online Ticket Sales."



**Community Players**

201 Robinhood Lane  
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**Newsletter Committee**

Jim Kalmbach  
John Lieder  
Bob McLaughlin  
Roland Spies  
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We are always looking for writers, artists, designers and story ideas. Send comments and suggestions to [lieder78@yahoo.com](mailto:lieder78@yahoo.com)

*Curtain Calls* is published six times a year for the voting members of Community Players.

For information about joining us, please contact the membership chair, Roland Spies at [roland.spies.gqt9@statefarm.com](mailto:roland.spies.gqt9@statefarm.com).

Back issues of *Curtain Calls* are available on the Community Players web site. Click on "Newsletter Archive."

## Joseph Auditions

Community Players is pleased to announce that it will be staging *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* as its 2007 Summer Theatre for Young People fund raiser. *Joseph* will run for 12 performances, July 13-15, 19-22, and 26-29.



### AUDITIONS FOR THE CHILDREN'S CHORUS

— by appointment only on Saturday, May 19 (children must have completed at least the third and no more than the seventh grade by the end of this school year; boys' voices must be unchanged). Children are asked to bring a recent photograph that can be left at the audition.

Appointments may be made by calling 663-2121 between 4 and 7 p.m. Wednesday, May 16, or between 1 and 4 p.m. on Thursday, May 17 (30+ children will be selected).

AUDITIONS FOR ADULTS — Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, May 21, 22, 23 at 7 p.m.; we need: 15 men, 16 and up, 1 Elvis impersonator age 18-45, and 13 women, 16 and up

ADULT BACKSTAGE CHORUS 4 men and 4 women any ages

After staging the show in 1996 and 2000 to great popular acclaim, we thought it was about time to bring *Joseph* back to the boards at Players. **Ted and Joan Ichniowski** will be producing the current production with **Wendy Clarendon** and **Alan Wilson** co-directing.

## The Taxman Cometh (and Goeth Again)

For those who may not yet have heard the news, Community Players had a great victory recently in its effort to be free of paying property taxes on the theater building. The essence of our argument is that we are a tax-exempt entity, recognized under federal law, and that we act as a cultural and educational resource for the community. And finally that argument prevailed in a decision we received some weeks ago from Springfield.

Many people deserve praise for assisting CP in making the case, including our casts and crews for putting on shows to benefit student groups and pay-what-you-can performances for the community, and **Jason Wiggins**, our Board Treasurer, who worked hard overseeing the matter, but without question the biggest applause is owed to Bloomington attorney **Tim Leighton**. Tim represented CP throughout the process which involved two hearings, including the final hearing

in Springfield in 2006 where we made our case to prove Community Players is a charitable organization that should be exempt from paying property taxes. The favorable decision we received in March eliminates the \$8,500 expense we faced every year and for the first time in over 10 years allows Players to have a balanced budget without the need of corporate and state grants. Tim and his staff were instrumental in navigating the legal processes surrounding this work.

In addition, Tim has been helpful in revising CP's Constitution and Bylaws, developing a building use rental agreement, assisting with legal/insurance matters that we face, and serving as a contact with the Post Office in our plans to make modifications to the building.

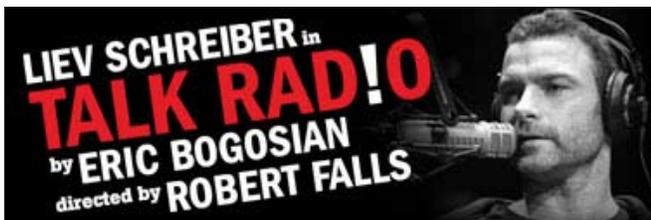
We owe Tim our thanks and we hope that he will continue to work with us for many years into the future.

# Mariano Tolentino On Broadway and Off

by Bob McLaughlin

Mariano Tolentino continues to be the only Community Players member who manages in the same season to have a bio in a program for a show on Robinhood Lane (for his ensemble role in *Sugar*) and in a *Playbill* for Broadway shows. The *Drowsy Chaperone*, the Tony Award winning show from last season for which he is Associate Producer, continues to run. And as this year's award season begins, Mariano is an investor in two new shows, one on Broadway, the other off.

The Broadway show is the revival of Eric Bogosian's 1987 play *Talk Radio*, about a shock-jock radio talk-show host in Cleveland who undergoes a meltdown of epic proportions on the night his show is being considered for a national broadcast. The abrasive, self-important host is played by Liev Schreiber, who, according to the *New York Times*, "confirms his status as the finest American theater actor of his generation." Many of the supporting actors never appear on stage—they perform the voices of the various desperate and lonely people who call in to the radio show. The play is both an indictment of everyday life in the United States and a study of the horrifying effects of fame gone wrong.



The Outer Circle Critics, the first group to announce award nominations this spring, have nominated Schreiber for Best Actor in a Play and the play for Best Revival. The Drama League has nominated the play for Distinguished Revival and Schreiber for Distinguished Performance. More nominations are sure to come.

Mariano's Off-Broadway show is a musical, *In the Heights*, about three days in the life of Washington Heights, a Latin American community in upper Manhattan. With a book by Quiara Alegría Hudes and music and lyrics by Lin-Manuel Miranda, the show interweaves several not too serious plots, the main ones focusing on a family that owns a gypsy cab company: the daughter feels guilty over the sacrifices her parents make to send her to Stanford; and one of their employees feels guilty over the crush he has on the daughter. As these problems get sorted out, other neighborhood

denizens pass through, singing and dancing to the Latin-inflected music. The *New York Times* sums up, "In many ways *In the Heights* suggests an uptown *Rent*, plus some salsa fresca and without the sex, drugs and disease."

The production is unusually lavish and the cast unusually large for an Off-Broadway show. The most famous cast member is Priscilla Lopez, from the original *A Chorus Line*. Mandy Gonzalez, who stars as the daughter, was the female lead in the notorious flop *Dance of the Vampires*, but she is given much better material here.



*In the Heights* received four Outer Critics Circle Nominations: Best Off-Broadway Musical, Best Score, Best Direction, and Best Choreography. The Drama League has nominated it for Distinguished Production of a Musical and has nominated Lin-Manuel Miranda for Distinguished Performance. As an Off-Broadway show, it won't be eligible for the Tony Awards, but it looks to be a big player in all the other awards.

You can learn more about both shows online:

<http://www.talkradioonbroadway.com>

<http://www.intheheightsthemusical.com>

Mariano also reports that *The Drowsy Chaperone* will open in London on June 6, with original Broadway star Bob Martin reprising his role as Man in Chair and London theater superstar Elaine Page as the title character. For those of us who haven't been able to get to New York or London, a National Tour will begin in the fall.

We continue to be awestruck at Mariano's involvement in these high-profile New York shows, and we wish him and the shows luck. We're also grateful that by his continued involvement in Community Players, Mariano shares a little bit of Broadway with the rest of us.

. . . Big River *continued from page 1.*

the roll drop, which has been masterfully painted as a river town in sepia tones by Dixon-Fox and **Cathy Sutliff**. The back wall is painted as a farmland scene, with brushwork done by **Charles Maaks**, **John Brittingham**, and **Marcia Weiss**. The stage right apron serves as the dining room of the Widow Douglas and the Phelps' home. The stage left apron provides the setting for Pap's cabin, Phelps' shed (where Jim is imprisoned) and a doctor's office.

**Marcia Weiss** is directing this production, with assistance from **Dorothy Mundy**. **Deb Smith** is producer, with assistance from **Aimee Kerber**. There are several people contributing to the musical aspect of the show: **Jennifer Kluchenek** (newcomer) is Musical Director, **Melody Palm** is vocals coach, **Angie Schwab** and **Kim Snyder** are rehearsal accompanists with **Emily Taylor** frequently pitching in at the lobby piano to help actors polish their musical numbers. **Sherise Kirvan** is Choreographer. **Carol Plotkin** is head of the properties team with help from **Opal Virtue** and **Sherry Bradshaw**. Opal is pulling double-duty and helping **Carolyn Beyer** with the costume design. Rounding out the production team are **Rich Plotkin** on sound, **Dan Virtue** on lights and **Judy Stroh**, stage manager.

The pay-what-you-can performance is Thursday, May 3 at 7:30. Other performance dates are May 4 – 6, 10 – 13 and 17 – 20. Evening performances begin at 7:30 with Sunday matinees beginning at 2:30.



## Song and Dance Man's Last Dance

The staff of *Curtain Calls* would like to extend best wishes to Kevin Conlin. Kevin hosted the program "The Song and Dance Man" on WGLT-FM for 15 years. March 7 was his last broadcast as WGLT has changed its Wednesday evening programming. Community Players was a sponsor of the show for a good number of years and Kevin would frequently give callers free tickets to Community Players productions. This season, Kevin had been featuring interviews with cast members of Players productions on the Wednesday evening programs following opening weekend.

Thanks, Kevin, for all you've done to promote theatre in Bloomington-Normal and McLean County. Best wishes on your future endeavors, and don't be a stranger!

## Community Players Community Outreach

In keeping with our new non-profit status, Community Players hosted two community events this spring.

Community Players Theatre provided the venue for the 21st annual *Pantagraph* Grand Final Spelling Bee sponsored by Busey Bank. Thirty spellers and about 150 family and friends attended the event. The theatre got high marks from The *Pantagraph* for its sound system. (Thanks to **Gary Ploense** and **Cris Embree** for setting up the mikes and being around to make final adjustments!) Melinda Matthews of Clinton won the event by spelling "anglophilia" in the 17th round.

Community Players also hosted the April "Business after Hours" event for the McLean County Chamber of Commerce. **Ronnie Jones** and **Matt Surgot** performed two numbers from *Big River*; **John Lieder** and **Deb Smith** performed a selection from *Fiddler on the Roof* and **Cathy Sutliff** sang a piece from *Crazy for You*. **Deb Smith** and **Tom Smith** handed out tickets as door prizes.

A good time was had by all.



Central Illinois spellers at the 21st annual *Pantagraph* Spelling Bee.



McLean County Chamber of Commerce "After Hours" at the CP Theatre.