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Talented Troup Tackles *Tenor*

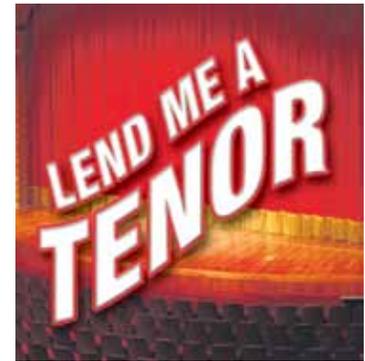
by John Lieder

Take eight of Community Players' most-seasoned comedic actors, give them a rollicking farce to work on, put them in the hands of a capable director and you've got a recipe for what promises to be one fun evening. Such is the anticipation with Ken Ludwig's *Lend Me a Tenor*, coming to Players' stage for two weekends, starting January 25.

Tenor is a classic mistaken identity farce. It premiered on the West End in 1986 and was first performed at CP in 1993. The audition article in the previous issue of *Curtain Calls* included an excellent synopsis of the plot. In brief, Henry Saunders, the general manager of the Cleveland Grand Opera, is frantic to make his production of *Otello* go off in spite of the sudden loss of its guest star, Tito Merelli, a.k.a. "Il Stupendo." To that end, he convinces his assistant Max to assume the identity of Tito and play the title character. Madness and a great amount of silliness ensue. **Joe Strupek** portrays Saunders with frenetic brilliance. **Brian Artman** is Merelli

and provides him with a wonderful combination of pomposity and genuine friendliness.

Tom Smith plays Max. It is a joy to watch his transformation from the timid assistant to the bombastic pseudo-Tito. **Hannah Kerns** plays Maggie, Saunders' daughter and Max's girlfriend. **Opal Virtue** plays Maria, Tito's jealous wife. **Thom Rakestraw** plays the bellhop, a persistent fan of the great Merelli. **Wendi Fleming** portrays the alluring Diana, lead soprano with the opera and **Reena Artman** is Julia, chairwoman of the opera guild.



Lend Me a Tenor is directed by **Cris Embree** with assistance from **Judy Stroh**, who is also the stage manager. **Jay Hartzler** is the producer. **Dan Virtue** is providing the lighting design, and **Rich Plotkin** is doing sound. **Anita Corso** is the master builder. **Opal Virtue** is doing costumes and **Kelly Slater** is the house manager.

Due to print deadlines, my visit to *Tenor* rehearsal had to occur several days before the cast was ready to work with costumes, so I really can't say much about them. However, I'm gathering from what I saw at rehearsal that those of us who would like to see more of Hannah Kerns and Wendi Fleming are going to get our chance—literally. Which brings me to a point: *Tenor* contains occasional crude language, sexual situations and a segment of rapid fire double entendres between Artman and Fleming



(left to right) Thom Rakestraw, Hannah Kerns, Joe Strupek, Wendi Fleming, Brian Artman, Opal Virtue look for answers from Tom Smith.

... continued on page 4.

January-February 2013

Board Meetings

January 8, 6:00 p.m.
February 12, 6:00 p.m.
Community Players Theatre

Lend Me a Tenor

Preview: Jan. 24
Shows: Jan. 25-27, Jan. 31-Feb. 3

To Kill a Mockingbird

Auditions: Jan. 28-29
Preview: March 14
Shows: March 15-17, 21-24

Broadway in Bloomington

(90th Season Musical Revue)
Auditions: Feb. 23-24
Shows: April 4-7



Community Players

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Newsletter Committee

Jim Kalmbach
Wendi Fleming
John Lieder
Bob McLaughlin
Bruce Parrish
Sally Parry

We are always looking for writers, artists, designers and story ideas. Send comments and suggestions to kalmbach@ilstu.edu

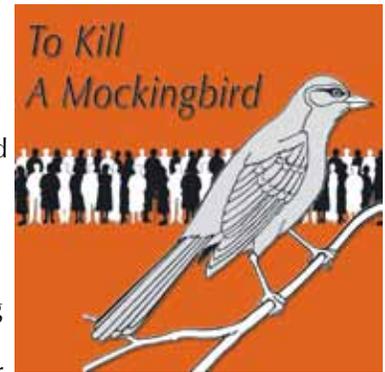
Curtain Calls is published six times a year for the voting members of Community Players.

For information about joining us, please contact our membership chair, Wendi Fleming at cplayersmember@aol.com.

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

To Kill a Mockingbird Auditions

It took Harper Lee two and a half years to write what is now considered to be one of the most beloved novels of the twentieth century. Published in 1960, *To Kill a Mockingbird* enjoyed unprecedented success before the ink was dry on its first printing. Being chosen by Readers' Digest and the Literary Guild for their condensed books guaranteed this unknown writer's first novel, which went on to win a Pulitzer, a wide readership. The 1962 film starring Gregory Peck cemented Lee's novel about life in rural Alabama during the Great Depression into our collective conscious.



Lee originally titled her novel "Atticus," but later changed her mind. The story is centered around Atticus Finch, single father to Jem and Scout. Disappointed in their father who only "works in a law office and reads," Scout and Jem are delighted when out-of-towner Dill appears to brighten their summers. Dill immediately invents a pastime, to try to draw out the reclusive Boo Radley, who never leaves his house. Atticus relies on his black housekeeper, Calpurnia, whom he trusts with the care of his children, while he is preoccupied with an explosive trial that threatens to rip the town apart.

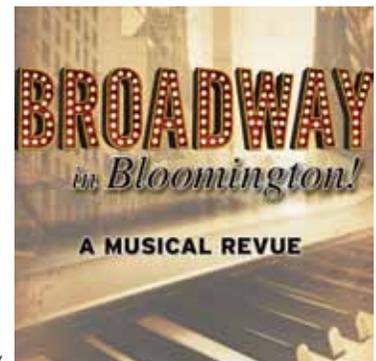
A young black field hand, Tom Robinson, has been wrongly accused of raping Mayella Ewell, a white woman. Her alcoholic father is bent on revenge, and Tom is convicted by a jury for a crime he never committed. Ewell is still wild with rage, and strikes out against Atticus by viciously attacking Jem and Scout, who are providentially saved by an unlikely hero.

Community Players is thrilled to be presenting *To Kill A Mockingbird* March 15-17 and March 21-24. Auditions will be held at the theatre January 28th and January 29th at 7:00 p.m. Male and female actors ages nine on up are encouraged to audition. Actors will be asked to read from the script. Questions? Contact director **Marcia Weiss** at mlcweiss@yahoo.com.



Broadway in Bloomington Auditions

Auditions are being held Saturday and Sunday, February 23 and 24, 2013 at 7 p.m. for *Broadway in Bloomington: Celebrating 90 Years of Community Players*. Those auditioning should dress for movement and are asked to prepare one song from a show that Players has done in the past. An accompanist will be provided. No prerecorded accompaniment or a cappella singing will be allowed. Early auditions can be arranged with director Sally Parry at separry@ilstu.edu. *Broadway in Bloomington* celebrates the history of Community Players through the songs that have been performed over the years. We are looking for about a dozen people (6M, 6W) to be the musical guides in this salute to our history.



The show, with direction by **Sally Parry**, musical direction by **Chad Kirvan**, and choreography by **Sherise Kirvan**, runs the weekend of April 4-7, 2013. The 90th anniversary committee will serve as producers.

Questions? Contact Sally Parry at separry@ilstu.edu

90 Years of Theater:

The History of Community Players, Part 4

by Dr. Wilson Baltz, Tony Holloway, and Bruce Parrish

As part of the celebration of Community Players' 90th Anniversary Season, we will offer the history of the organization. Part 1 covered the founding and the first decade. Part 2 looked at the second decade, 1934-1944. Part 3 surveyed 1945 to 1958. Part 4 covers the building of the Robinhood Lane theater and moves on to 1968.

As we left the Community Players history in the last issue of *Curtain Calls*, the group had just secured the Esquire Theater on South Madison Street for its new home. Alas, no sooner had plans been made for the theater than the city decided it wanted the site for a parking lot. Despite an impassioned letter to the *Pantagraph*, the building was condemned, and Players lost their short-lived home.

The 1959-1960 season was a down one for Players. Having lost their theater, they were in limbo, but through the hard work of C. E. Mulliken, the Robinhood Lane property was acquired. This season contains one remarkable bit of trivia: although longtime members have insisted that there were no tickets sold for a production that season, Players did sell tickets to a 45-minute melodrama presented during the annual membership meeting.

The new Bloomington High School was the site for two plays in the 1960-1961 season, while construction began on the Robinhood Lane building. Players launched *Showboat* in 1961 to raise necessary building funds. There was a cast of 120 actors, and 25 members of the Bloomington-Normal Symphony volunteered to perform for this challenging production. Even with production costs growing to \$5,000, *Showboat* was so successful it brought in \$10,000 profit to build walls and the roof for Players' new home. *Showboat* was the only Players show to be directed by theater legend Chaunce Conklin; Dr. Howard Rye conducted the orchestra.

The first play presented on Robinhood Lane was *Death of a Salesman*, the only show of the 1961-1962 season. The theater building was no more than a shell: there was no raised stage, and patient theatergoers sat on folding chairs and boards supported by cinder blocks. Still, the production received rave reviews. In the 1962-1963 season, Players realized an old dream: to produce an entire season in their own playhouse. It was their 40th continuous season. The thriller *The Desperate Hours* finally played that season (revived in 2006), with Dr. Tony Chrisman and his wife Ruth Marie as the leads. They

appeared together in several shows. In 1964's *On Borrowed Time*, Jobie Tick's apple tree held 1,200 handmade leaves and two bushels of real apples. Also in 1964 Joan Wahl, a former professional actress, directed *Guys and Dolls* (revived in 1993 and 2008). *The Sound of Music*, in 1965, was a frightening experience for some of the actors. Robert McFarland and Dr. Wilson Baltz had to ad lib in German for several minutes when another actor missed an entrance. In another scene the late Jack Ingold and Ginger Englesman were onstage when curtain equipment broke and fell to the ground.

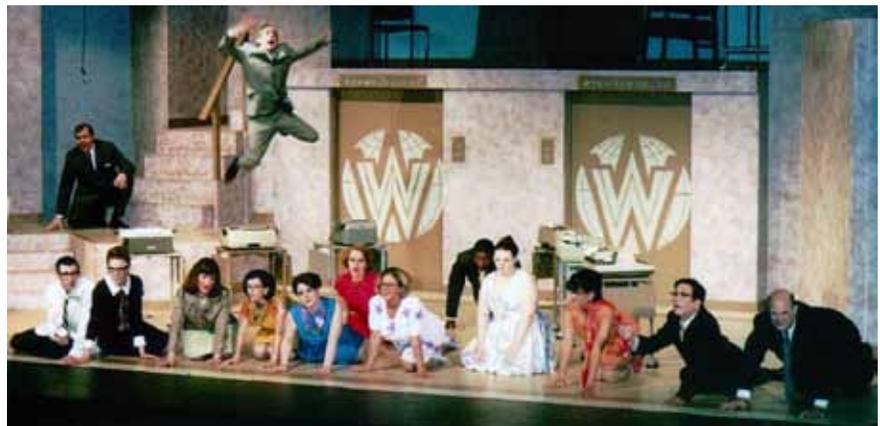
At the close of their fourth decade in 1966, Players paid off the mortgage on Robinhood Lane. It had taken only five years.

In 1967 the *Pantagraph* announced Players' acquisition of a new lighting system. It was reported that General Electric and Art Lee, a G.E. electronics engineer and a Players member, would make available a solid-state, automated, console-type light board. The board had a spacious capacity of 30 circuits and 30,000 watts, as compared to the then-used 12-circuit board. Players were the first non-professional theater to have such a board. The board had a value of \$30,000, but due to the generosity of G.E. and Lee, Players purchased it for \$1,000.



History Mystery Contest!

Be the first to identify this new photo. Extra credit for identifying year and the performers. Answers must be sent via e-mail to rmclaugh@ilstu.edu. The winner and runners up will be announced in the next issue!



2013-2014 Season

Community Players is proud and excited to announce the 2013/2014 season, as well as the summer of 2014 show! We know you will enjoy the wide variety of dramatic, comedic, and musical offerings.

Aida will officially open the new season on July 12, 2013. *Aida* will run July 12–14, 18–21, 25–28. Auditions will be May 19–21.

Kicking off the fall season is ***Arsenic and Old Lace***, a play by America playwright Joseph Kesselring running September 6–8 and 12–15 with auditions on July 22 and 23.

Next up is the show Community Players tried to get a year ago, ***Monty Python's Spamalot***. This musical comedy was written by Eric Idle, with collaboration from John Du Prez on most of the music. *Spamalot* will run November 8–10, 14–17, 21–24. Auditions will be September 16–18.

December 12–15 will bring a four-day run of the stage adaptation presented as a 1940's radio show, ***It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play***. This version is adapted by Joe Landry. Watch the Community Players website for audition information.

Opening the new year of 2014 will be ***The Diary of Anne Frank***. This challenging and moving drama was originally written by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett. Our show will be the play that was newly adapted by Wendy Kesselman. *The Diary of Anne Frank* will run January 17–19, 23–26, with auditions on November 25 and 26 of 2013.

Opening March 21 and running through the 23rd, 27–30, and April 3–6 is the musical comedy, ***9 to 5: The Musical***. It features a book by Patricia Resnick, based on her screenplay with Colin Higgins and music by Dolly Parton. Auditions for *9 to 5* will be January 27–29.

May of 2014 brings the uproarious Neil Simon comedy, ***The Odd Couple***, to the Players stage. *The Odd Couple* will run May 16–18, and 22–25. Auditions will be March 31 and April 1.

Our 2014 summer show will be ***Shrek The Musical***, with music by Jeanine Tesori and book and lyrics by David Lindsay-Abaire. *Shrek* was nominated for eight Tony Awards in 2009, including Best Musical. *Shrek The Musical* will run July 11–13, 17–20, and 24–27 in 2014. Auditions will be May 18–20.

More information about these shows is available on the Community Players' website. Click on "Next Season."

90th Anniversary Update

The celebration of the 90th anniversary of Community Players continues this year with the following:

Wednesday, March 6, at 4:30 p.m.: **ribbon cutting** by the McLean County Chamber of Commerce, followed by a **reception**, and at 5:30, a **staged reading of *Overtones*** (1915) by Alice Gerstenburg, a one-act play that was the first production of Community Players, directed by John Lieder.

Broadway to Bloomington, a musical revue looking back over our history through music, will be performed April 4-7. Look for lots of music and guest stars!

A **Gala** to round off our celebration of the 90th season will be held Saturday, June 1, at Illinois State University's Alumni Center. There will be dinner, dancing, a silent auction, and live entertainment. Tickets are available at the Community Players website.



Historian's Corner

The State Fire Marshall dampened the spirits of the Players when, just before the opening of *The Bat* in 1945, the Majestic Theatre was condemned as being unsafe, even for bats. After flitting around a month, *The Bat* found a dark and empty space at NCHS and opened May 19, 1945.

... *Lend Me a Tenor* preview continued from page 1.

totally worth the price of admission. You probably don't want to bring your pre-teens or your grandma to this one. Well, maybe your grandma, if she's really cool, because this show is very, very funny! I'm looking forward to seeing the polished performance.

The pay-what-you-can Preview performance for *Lend Me a Tenor* is Thursday, January 24, 2013. Regular performances are January 25-27 and January 31–February 3, with the usual start times of 7:30 for evening performances and 2:30 for Sunday matinees.

Rene Ellison will be at the Saturday, January 26th performance interpreting in sign language for the hearing impaired, courtesy of a grant from the Illinois Prairie Community Foundation.