



COMMUNITY PLAYERS

CURTAIN CALLS

Vol. 7.6

March, 2012

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Players Conjures Up *Blithe Spirit*

by Bob McLaughlin

Noël Coward's *Blithe Spirit* is possibly the best and certainly the funniest example of its genre: the drama of paranormal bigamy. It tells the story of writer Charles Condomine, who, in order to research the supernatural, invites his friends Dr. and Mrs. Bradman along with a local medium, Madame Arcati, to a dinner-party-cum-séance. The proceedings appear to be a bust until, after the guests have left, Charles is confronted with the ghost of his late wife, Elvira. He is also confronted with the problem of how to explain this to his second and very much alive wife, Ruth. The play goes on to explore such questions as: Does love survive past the grave? Do wedding vows lapse after the funeral? Can one be jealous of ectoplasm? Can Madame Arcati un-conjure spirits? How will the maid clean up after all this?

Coward wrote this very funny comedy in the midst of tragic circumstances.

His apartment and office having been destroyed in the German bombing of London, he took a holiday in Portmeirion, Wales (the eccentric town where the classic TV series *The Prisoner* was filmed), and was inspired to write an escapist play that might entertain his countrymen in wartime. He



claimed to have written the script in five days and to have changed barely a line before its premiere in London on July 21, 1941. And apparently he judged his audiences' appetites astutely: the London production ran for a then-record 1,997 performances; Coward himself starred in a British touring company; the Broadway production, which opened later in 1941, starred Clifton Webb and Mildred Natwick and ran for 657 performances; a film version, adapted by Coward and starring Rex Harrison and Margaret Rutherford, was made in 1945. The play has proved resilient in peacetime as well, with numerous West End and Broadway revivals over the years, most recently in 2009 with Angela Lansbury, Rupert Everett, and Christine Ebersole. There have also been a couple of TV versions and a musical adaptation, *High Spirits*, which ran on Broadway in 1964.



Madame Arcati doing her best to get rid of the two Mrs. Condomines.

... continued on page 4.

March - April 2012

Board Meetings

Mar. 13 6:00 p.m.
April 10, 6:00 p.m.
Community Players Theatre

Blithe Spirit

Preview: March 1
Shows: March 2-4, 8-11, 15-17

**You Know I Can't Hear You
When the Water's Running**

Shows: March 22-25

Hairspray

Auditions:
Kids (13-15) March 11 6:00 pm
Adults March 11-13 7:00 pm
Preview: May 10
Shows: May 11-13, 17-20, 24-27



Community Players

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Jim Kalmbach
Wendi Fleming
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Bob McLaughlin
Bruce Parrish
Sally Pary

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."

Hairspray Auditions

Hairspray is a musical with music by Marc Shaiman, lyrics by Scott Wittman and Shaiman and a book by Mark O'Donnell and Thomas Meehan, based on the 1988 John Waters film *Hairspray*. The songs include 1960s-style dance music and "downtown" rhythm and blues. In 1962 Baltimore, Maryland, plump teenager Tracy Turnblad's dream is to dance on *The Corny Collins Show*, a local TV dance program based on the real-life *Buddy Deane Show*. When Tracy wins a role on the show, she becomes a celebrity overnight. She then launches a campaign to integrate the show. *Hairspray* is a social commentary on the injustices of parts of American society in the 1960s.



The musical's original Broadway production opened on August 15, 2002 and won eight Tony Awards out of thirteen nominations. It ran for over 2,500 performances and closed on January 4, 2009. *Hairspray* has also had national tours, a London West End production, and numerous foreign productions and was adapted as a 2007 musical film.

Community Players' production of *Hairspray* will be directed by **Alan Wilson**, choreographed and co-directed by **Wendy Baugh**, assistant directed by **Kelli Beal**, produced by **Brett Cottone**, vocal directed by **Angie Schwab** and orchestra directed by **Eugene Phillips**. The preview for *Hairspray* is May 10 with performances on May 11-13, 17-20, and 24-27.

Open auditions are Sunday, March 11, Monday, March 12 and Tuesday, March 13 at 7 pm at Community Players Theatre for ages 16 and older. Performers auditioning will be asked to sing 16 bars of a song of your choice. Please bring the sheet music with you; accompaniment will be provided. You will also be asked to read from the script and participate in a fun dance audition. (Bring dance clothes and shoes if you like.)

We will also be having auditions for ages 13, 14, and 15 on Sunday, March 11 at 6 pm. The kids auditioning at this age will only be asked to sing and dance. We will have callbacks for this age range on Tuesday March 13 at 7 pm.

Contact producer Brett Cottone with questions at brett.cottone@gmail.com.

History Mystery Contest!

We had only one winner for last month's History Mystery Contest: Dorothy Mundy correctly identified the photo as being from *You Know I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running*. She was also close in guessing the year (Nov.-Dec. 1969) and correctly identified the center actor in the photo as Tony Holloway. The other actors are James Keeran (to the left) and Dr. Wilson Baltz (to the right). Congratulations, Dorothy!

Here's a new photo and another chance. Identify the

show from Players' past represented in this photo. Bonus points for identifying the year. Double bonus points for identifying the performers. Send answers to rmclaugh@ilstu.edu. Winners will be praised in the next issue!



Lab Show Introduces New Directors

by John Lieder

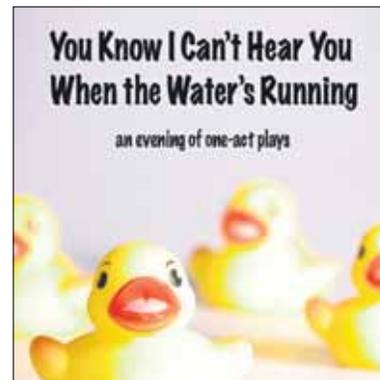
The “lab show” concept was introduced at CP in 2007 with a “studio production” of George Bernard Shaw’s *Don Juan in Hell*. By definition, lab shows are experimental and they give us the opportunity to try some things that we might not want to risk with a regular season show. For example, in *Woman in Black* and *art*, we moved the audience on stage. We’ve experimented with lighting and staging and, with David Mamet’s *Oleanna*, we pushed the envelope with topic and language. In general, our lab shows have had small casts and been easy to stage. That continues this season, but in addition, this season’s lab shows are serving as a chance for potential new directors to stick their collective toes in the water. Hence, **Dave Lemmon** directed his first show, *Murder at the Howard Johnson’s* last fall. This spring’s *You Know I Can’t Hear You When the Water’s Running* (we’ll say *YKICHYWTWR* from now on so this article doesn’t run to three pages!) provides an opportunity for four new directors.

YKICHYWTWR is really four separate plays, all written by Robert Anderson, and all dealing with the topic of sex, or more precisely, our attitudes toward it. In the first play, “The Shock of Recognition,” directed by **Dorothy Mundy**, we are presented with an author who is trying to convince his producer to allow a man to briefly walk on stage naked. **Gary Strunk** is the producer, **Dave Krostal** is the author and **Ben Hackett** is the actor altogether too eager to get into the altogether. **Melissa Fornoff** plays the secretary.

The second play, “The Footsteps of Doves,” directed by **Brett Cottone**, has a middle-aged couple shopping to replace their full size bed with a pair of twin beds. The husband, George, played by **Mark Robinson**, is hesitant to give up the old full size and the good times it represents whereas the wife, Harriet, played by **Nancy Nickerson**, faces the situation entirely pragmatically. When a young lady (played by **Melissa Fornoff**) comes in shopping for a new mattress and strikes up a conversation with George, he is given a new perspective. **Jason Strunk** plays the Salesman.

The third play, “I’ll be Home for Christmas,” directed by **Joel Shoemaker**, depicts another middle-aged married couple who are having a rather frank discussion about what to tell their teen-aged children about sex. The conservative father, Chuck, played by **Dave Lemmon**, is at odds with the enlightened wife, Edith, played by **Bridgette Richard**. Their daughter, Clarice, is played by **Mindy LaHood**.

The final play, “I’m Herbert,” directed by **Sherry Bradshaw**, depicts a very elderly couple who keep getting memories of their past relationships confused. **John Lieder** is Herbert and **Kelly Peiffer** is his wife, Muriel.



While our main-stage production of *Blithe Spirit* (see page 1) is using the stage, the four directors have had to scrounge somewhat for rehearsal space and time. Fortunately the relatively small number of actors in each scene allows for considerable flexibility in this regard.

YKICHYWTWR is being produced by **Brian Artman**. **Opal Virtue** is doing costumes. **Joe Strupek** is stage manager. **Rich Plotkin** is doing sound and wife **Carol** is doing properties. Newcomer **Stephanie Papesh** is the lighting designer. Stephanie comes to us from Eureka College where she majored in theatre and got experience with lighting design and directing. Welcome to Community Players, Stephanie!

You Know I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running runs only one weekend, March 22 through 25, and there is no preview performance. Although the show is fairly tame by today's standards, it contains some blunt language and the content is not intended for very young children.

Lab Show rehearsal pictures can be found on page 4.

Historian's Corner

In 1938 there were costuming problems for *Our Town*. Straw hats were at a premium. Five hats for men in the cast were ordered from a little backwoods store near Ownings Mills, Maryland. This store was discovered by **Mrs. Fred Wollrab**, a Players member, during a trip to Baltimore. These hats had been lying undisturbed on a second-floor shelf for over 40 years.

. . . *Blithe Spirit* preview continued from page 1.

History demonstrates Noël Coward (1899-1973) to have been a true polymath. Playwright, songwriter, director, actor, diplomat, Coward was born of the middle class, but came to master the offhand wit of the British upper classes (He: "Is there anything interesting in *The Times*?" She: "Don't be absurd."). But his plays offer more than just their humor. Coward had the ability to find the absurdity *and* the heart in his characters' relationships, which is why they continue to entertain and speak to us.

For Community Players' production, director **Tom Smith** has gathered the following cast: **Thom Rakestraw** as Charles; **Gayle Hess** as current wife Ruth; **Hannah Kerns** as spirit-wife Elvira; **Judy Stroh** as Madame Arcati; **Joe Culpepper** as Dr. Bradman; **Nancy Nickerson** as Mrs. Bradman; and, making her Players debut, **Jennifer Hart** as Edith, the maid.

Producer **Chris Strupek** has assembled a stellar staff: Costume Designer **Ken Sprouls**; Property Masters **Dorothy Mundy** and **Carol Plotkin**; Sound Designer **Rich Plotkin**; Lighting Designer **Mark Wright**; Master Builder **Jeremy Stiller**, who collaborated with Tom Smith in designing the set; Stage Manager **DJ LaRocque**; and House Manager **Wendi Fleming**.

Blithe Spirit will offer its Pay-What-You-Can Preview Performance on Thursday, March 1. Regular performances will be March 2-4, 8-11, 15-17. As usual, evening performances begin at 7:30 and Sunday matinees begin at 2:30. Come out and enjoy this ghost story: it's so funny, it's scary.



"The Footsteps of Doves" Nancy Nickerson, Mark Robinson, and Jason Strunk.



"I'll be Home for Christmas" Bridgette Richard and Dave Lemmon.

Rehearsal Pictures from *You Know I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running*



"The Shock of Recognition" Gary Strunk, Ben Hackett, and Dave Krostal.



"I'm Herbert" John Lieder and Kelly Peiffer.