



# COMMUNITY PLAYERS

## CURTAIN CALLS

Vol. 8.3

September, 2012

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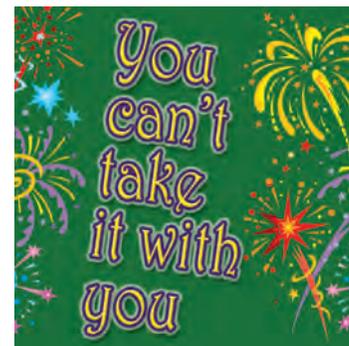
## An American Classic Kicks Off the 90<sup>th</sup> Season

by John Lieder

Seventy-five years ago, *You Can't Take It with You*, by George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart, won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. The film version, produced the next year, won the Academy Award for Best Picture and featured legend Lionel Barrymore and legend-to-be Jimmy Stewart. I believe that qualifies it as an American classic. How appropriate that we kick off our 90<sup>th</sup> season with a comedy of this stature!

The play is chockfull of wonderfully eccentric characters. There's Grandpa Vanderhof (played with folksy wit and charm by newcomer **Bruce Weise**), whose idea of a good time is going to Columbia University for the commencement exercises, doesn't pay income tax because he doesn't think the government will make good

use of the money, and whose unconventional philosophy of life is the driving force of the show. There's his daughter Penny (**Judy Stroh**), who writes plays one ... letter ... at ... a ... time, plays tennis and paints (both badly). His son-in-law, Paul Sycamore (**Tom Smith**) builds fireworks in the basement and plays with an Erector set. There's Mr. De Pinna (**Thom Rakestraw**), the iceman who came to the house eight years ago and never left. There is



Paul and Penny's daughter Essie (**Bridgette Richard**) who makes candy and still dreams of making a living as a ballerina after eight years of lessons. There's her husband, Ed (**Jason Strunk**), who sells the candy Essie makes, plays the xylophone, and enjoys printing anything that sounds good on his printing press. Rhea (**Opal Virtue**) is their cook who fixes cornflakes, watermelon, and "some kind of meat" and Donald (**Jay Hartzler**) is her fly-catching boyfriend and the family's handyman and "gofer." Visitors to the household are a Russian ballet instructor (**Allen Popowski**), an alcoholic actress (played by newcomer **Debbie Reynolds**), and even the Grand Duchess Olga Katrina (**Cris Embree**). The one "normal" person in the household is Paul and Penny's other daughter, Alice (**Melissa Fornoff**), who is up against it trying to have a normal relationship with her



Boyfriend Tony Kirby gets introduced to the Sycamore family in a scene from Act I.

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# COMMUNITY PLAYERS Calendar

Sept. - Oct. 2012

## Board Meetings

Sept. 11, 6:00 p.m.  
Oct. 9, 6:00 p.m.  
Community Players Theatre

## You Can't Take It with You

Preview: Aug. 30  
Shows: Aug. 31- Sept. 2, Sept. 6-9

## Leaving Iowa

Auditions: Sept. 4 & 5, 7 p.m.  
Shows: Oct. 4 - 7

## White Christmas

Auditions: Oct. 6, 2 p.m.  
Oct. 7 & 8, 7 p.m.  
Preview: Nov. 29  
Shows: Nov. 30 - Dec. 2, Dec. 6-9 & 13-16



## 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](mailto: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](mailto:cplayersmember@aol.com).

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

## White Christmas Auditions

According to the *Guinness Book of World Records*, the Irving Berlin song "White Christmas," first performed by Bing Crosby in the 1942 movie *Holiday Inn*, is the most successful single of all time. Its success led to the film *White Christmas* (1954), featuring the song, of course, with Crosby, Danny Kaye, Rosemary Clooney, and Vera-Ellen. The stage version of the film toured America in 2004, opened on Broadway in 2008, and now comes to Community Players' stage in time for this holiday season.



The show is a natural fit for community theatre. It is about friendship, sisterhood, duty to family, friends and country – about our connections to those around us. All this, tied up in a happy little Christmas package of seventeen marvelous Irving Berlin songs such as "Sisters," "Blue Skies," and "I've Got My Love to Keep Me Warm."

There are three female and three male leads, with some significant supporting roles for a total cast size of about twenty. One female, aged 8 - 15, is also needed.

Production dates are November 29 - December 2, December 6-9 and December 13-16.

There is a very significant change to the traditional audition schedule for this production. Auditions begin **Saturday afternoon, October 6 at 2:00 PM** and continue October 7 & 8 beginning at 7:00 PM. Those auditioning should dress for movement (tap shoes would be helpful but are optional) and are asked to prepare 16 – 24 bars of prepared music. An accompanist will be provided. No prerecorded accompaniment or a cappella singing will be allowed. Early auditions can be arranged with director Deb Smith at [debsdarb@msn.com](mailto:debsdarb@msn.com). Further questions can be addressed to Deb or producers John and Jean Lieder ([lieder78@yahoo.com](mailto:lieder78@yahoo.com)).

## September Mystery Photo

Congratulations to Tom Smith for correctly identifying last month's mystery photo as *Close Ties*, from 1989. The actors are, from left to right: Kerry Dixon, Nancy Niebur, and Mary Jewel.

year and the performers. Answers must be send via e-mail to [rmclaugh@ilstu.edu](mailto:rmclaugh@ilstu.edu). The winner and runners up will be announced in the next issue!

As a prize, Tom received a Community Players 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season Mug! You too can win a mug by being the first to identify this photo. Extra credit for identifying



To see a color version of this month's mystery photo, go to <http://communityplayers.tumblr.com>

# 90 Years of Theater: The History of Community Players

## Part 2

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

As part of the celebration of Community Players' 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season, the Newsletter will offer the history of the organization. Part 1 covered the founding and the first decade. Part 2 looks at the second decade, 1934-1944.

As the country worked its way through the Great Depression, Community Players was entering a new era. The February 1934 show, *Lombardi, Ltd.*, was a vehicle for the advance showing of the season's fashions. Dr. Hubert W. Hodgens of the IWU School of Drama directed *Big Hearted Herbert* in 1935. *The Panatgraph* editorialized, "The Community Players, instead of reaching a peak to begin a decline, seem to be on the upward and brightening ascent toward better things in a sphere of self-expression which seems to represent ever-widening possibilities." That

year, Edward H. Davison left Players to become Director of Radio Drama for NBC in Chicago. Also in 1935 a man pretending to represent *Theatre Arts Magazine* attempted to bilk Players in a confidence game involving subscriptions. He was caught and jailed. In a surprising and innovative move during Philip Barry's *Holiday* that same year, the curtain was left open between acts while the set was being changed. It was to acquaint the audience with "stage work."

During rehearsals for *Ceiling Zero* in 1936, J. Paul Hughes had his appendix removed at Mennonite Hospital. He recovered in time to be on stage for two nights of the run. Transforming the bobbed hairstyles of 1937 into the coiffures of the turn of the century posed a problem for the women in *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*. Happily, they succeeded in achieving the right look. Teresa Coltreaux played Susan in Rachel Crothers' *Susan and God* in 1939, with Eula O'Neill directing.

(In 1964 Robert Price, later on the New York stage, directed the second showing of *Susan*, with Lou Ann Hiser as Susan.) The audience for *The Night of January 16<sup>th</sup>* was immediately swept into the spirit of the drama by being ushered to their seats by uniformed McLean County sheriffs. City policemen served as ushers to lend atmosphere to *I Want a Policeman*. Not to be outdone by

the men on the force, Chief of Police Clyde Hibbens was on stage as the Police Commissioner.

During World War II, Players carried on with programs of one-act plays, which could be arranged with minimum effort and time. Although hindered, hampered, and understaffed, due to wartime conditions, Players maintained the excellence of previous productions through the war years.



*Big Hearted Herbert* Community Players 1935

Players ended their twentieth season with *Tovarich*. C. E. Mulliken and Alice Mulliken took their roles of husband and wife in real life right on stage in *Mr. & Mrs. North*. After this season, the Scottish Rite Temple (now the Bloomington Center for the Performing Arts) would be Players primary home for the next fifteen seasons.

### Historian's Corner

For the past thirty-five years, actors have been performing for the Illinois Shakespeare Festival at Ewing Manor, the former home of Mrs. Davis Ewing.

But did you know that in June of 1930, Community Players performed at what was then known as "In the Court at Sunset Hills"? On June 12, 1930, at the home of Mrs. Davis Ewing, Community Players presented *The Romancers* by Edmond Rostand.

## Leaving Iowa - Auditions

Community Players will be holding auditions for *Leaving Iowa*, the comedy by Tim Clue and Spike Manton, on Tuesday, September 4, and Wednesday, September 5, at 7 p.m. in the theater. This laboratory theater production runs for one weekend only, October 4-7, 2012.



The comedy has its roots in the family car trip that we've all taken (and fought over). The play focuses on middle-aged writer Don Browning who recalls endless road trips with his parents and sister. In the present he has returned home, three years after his father has died, in order to take the ashes to his childhood home. Unfortunately the house is now a grocery store so he must spend the rest of his vacation trying to find an appropriate spot for his dad. His memories of the places that they've gone together as he drives around Iowa are both amusing and bittersweet.

Director **Sally Parry** and producer **Dorothy Mundy** are looking for six talented actors, three male and three female, who enjoy the challenge of lab theater. The ages of the characters are listed for how they should be portrayed, not necessarily the actor's true age. Please e-mail Sally at [separry@ilstu.edu](mailto:separry@ilstu.edu) if you have questions.

**Don (30-40):** In the present he is a successful reporter who was too busy to attend his father's funeral and now feels guilty. He also plays his younger self, a kind of whiny and annoying younger brother who hated family vacations.

**Dad (60's):** In the present he's a quiet ghost who communes with Don on his journey. In the past he's the dad who planned family vacations around every educational and historical highlight of the American road. He was the ultimate father; the loving boss of the family.

**Mom (60's):** Don's mom past and present. In the past she has been the ultimate peacemaker on these family road trips. Currently she is still "mothering," but becoming a little flighty as she ages. Mom feels very guilty for having left Dad in his urn forgotten in the basement for the last three years.

**Sis (30's - 40's):** Don's older sister, past and present. In the past she is the typical big sister – overbearing, teasing, sneaky. In the present, Sis is controlling, somewhat critical, but obviously loves her family.

**Multiple Characters Male (30's & up):** plays all the male characters Don encounters on his road trip – in flashbacks and present day vignettes: farmers, Don's grandfather and uncle, grocery store clerk, Civil War performer, mechanic, park ranger, etc.

**Multiple Characters Female (30's & up):** plays all the other female characters encountered including Don's grandmother and aunt, Amish peddler, museum assistant, mechanic, drunk woman in hotel, talkative waitress, etc.



... *You Can't Take It with You* preview continued from page 1.

boss's son, Tony (**Spencer Powell**), especially when his parents (played by **Dave Lemmon** and newcomer **Mary Weise**) arrive for dinner a night early.

Rounding out the cast are Players' veterans **Steven Fegert**, **Jeff Ready**, and **Gary Ploense**.

The action of the play takes place entirely in the Vanderhof/Sycamore living room. The set, designed and built by director **Jeremy Stiller**, is a lovely time machine circa 1936. The set actually reminds me of my grandma's house, except she didn't keep snakes and didn't have a xylophone.

**Hannah Kerns** serves as assistant director and stage manager. **Joel Shoemaker** is producer. **Mark Wright** is lighting designer and **Opal Virtue** is costume designer. **Dorothy Mundy** manages the properties, newcomer (sure like using that word in these preview articles!) **Rob Carroll** is sound designer, and **Wendi Fleming** is house manager.

The Pay-What-You-Can Preview Performance is August 30. Regular performances are August 31 through September 2 and September 6 through 9. Please note that this season non-musicals run only seven performances over just **two weekends**.



### ***Curtain Calls* The Blog**

Over the years, we have received much more material than is possible to run in a bimonthly four-page newsletter. With Brett Cottone's help, we have started a *Curtain Calls* blog that will offer additional news and pictures about Community Players' shows and people. You can read the blog at <http://communityplayers.tumblr.com/>

This month, we feature an article about Community Players' annual outing to a CornBelters game as well as updates about Joe Culpepper's bicycle ride across America and John Contarino's move to Florida.