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Vol. 9.2

September, 2013

Players Serves up Fall Tonic with *Arsenic ... And Old Lace*

by John Lieder

Community Players opens its 91st season with the black comedy *Arsenic and Old Lace*. Last performed here in 1985, *Arsenic* was first produced at Players in 1942, just two years after its premiere on Broadway. Our 2013 production is full of solid actors, a few of whom are back from a bit of a Players hiatus, in what promises to be a delightfully fun evening of murder, mayhem, and wackiness.

Arsenic is the story of a pair of spinsters who “put away” their elderly male houseguests with elderberry wine laced with the titular poison. It’s all with the best of intentions, of course, but when their murderous nephew, the notorious criminal Jonathan Brewster, comes home with yet another corpse, it gets law-abiding brother Mortimer frantically scheming to get Jonathan into jail and to keep his aunts out.

The two elderly aunts are portrayed by Players veterans **Carol Scott** as Abby Brewster with **Tricia Stiller** as her sister Martha. Tricia returns to our stage for the first time since 2005 and I believe it’s been 2009 since Carol traipsed our boards. The pair is a hoot-and-a-half. Players stalwart **Brian Artman** appears as their nephew

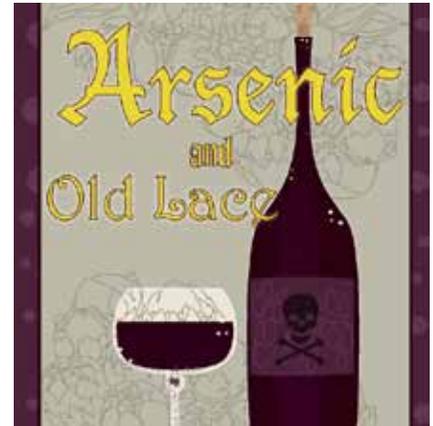
Mortimer, who, in the midst of all the craziness, is engaged to neighbor Elaine Harper, played by workhorse **Hannah Kerns**.

Nathan Bottorff is the menacing Jonathan Brewster, a role originated on Broadway by Boris Karloff.

Veteran **Thom Rakestraw** portrays Jonathan’s partner-in-crime, the plastic surgeon Dr. Einstein. Newcomer **Joel Baldwin** plays Uncle Teddy Brewster, who believes he is Teddy Roosevelt and so digs the “Panama Canal” in the Brewster basement. The canal conveniently serves as graves for the aunts’ victims.

Alan Wilson returns to the Players stage for the first time since 2004 as neighborhood policeman and aspiring playwright, Officer O’Hara. He is joined by Officers Klein (played by **Spencer Powell**), Brophy (played by newcomer **Jim Woodward**), and Lieutenant Rooney (played by another Players veteran, **Jeremy Stiller**). Rounding out the cast are **Andy Cary** in the roles of Rev. Harper and Mr. Witherspoon, and newcomer **Aaron Watson** as Mr. Gibbs.

Tom Smith is director and **Joe Strupek** is his assistant. Newcomer **Tyler McWhorter** is the stage manager. **Chris Strupek** is producer and another Players veteran back from hiatus is costumer **Eddy Arteman**. **Rich Plotkin** is doing the sound design while the sound board will be run by **Cris Embree Ploense**. **Mark Wright** is doing the lighting design.



Trish Stiller, Thom Rakestraw, Nathan Bottorff and Carol Scott rehearse a scene from *Arsenic and Old Lace*.

Continued on page 4 . . .

September - October 2013

Board Meetings

September 10 6:00 p.m.
October 15, 6:00 p.m.
Community Players Theatre

Arsenic and Old Lace

Preview: Sept. 5
Shows: Sept. 6-8, 12-15

Spamalot

Auditions: Sept. 16-18, 7 pm
Preview: Nov. 7
Shows: Nov.8-10, 14-17, 21-24

It's a Wonderful Life:

A Live Radio Play
Auditions: Oct. 26-28 7 pm
Shows: Dec. 12-15



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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."

Spamalot Auditions

In the 60's the Brits gave us the Beatles for rock and roll, and Monty Python for comedy. The BBC's *Monty Python's Flying Circus* leapt over the pond, and Eric Idle, John Cleese, Terry



Jones, Michael Palin, Graham Chapman, and the lone American, Terry Gilliam, enjoyed rock star status as they burst onto the world stage with their irreverent brand of comedy, of the most silly variety.

In 1975 the Pythons created the film, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. Decades later Eric Idle would convert this kooky cinematic interpretation of the plague-ridden Middle Ages and the Arthurian Legend into the 2005 blockbuster musical, *Spamalot*. Garnering fourteen Tony nominations and capturing the prize for Best Musical, millions of audience members since have borne witness to this enduring mockery of the Knights of the Round Table and their quest for the Holy Grail.

Community Players is thrilled to be producing *Spamalot*, which will run November 8 through November 24. Auditions will be held September 16, 17, and 18. Thirty humorous actors and actresses who can sing, dance, and banter with a slightly British accent are needed. Actors (ages eighteen and up) will be asked to read from the script, sing a prepared song (musical accompaniment will be provided), and learn a dance routine. Auditions will start at 7p.m. each evening at the theatre.

Brush up on your "silly walks," your best "Knights of Ni" impressions, and come prepared to have a laugh as this most hilarious of musicals is cast.

Marcia Weiss - Director



CornBelters Outing a Big Success

Fifty members of the Community Players family celebrated the beginning of a new season by attending a tailgate and minor league baseball game at the Corncrib on Sunday August 18, organized by our membership chair **Wendi Fleming**. Thanks also to **Chris Terven** who donated the chicken.

Members of the cast of *Aida* sang the national anthem (after having sung it during warm-ups before each show), and we all gathered on the concourse to serenade the crowd during the seventh inning stretch by singing "Take Me out to the Ball Game."

To cap off an excellent evening of camaraderie, good food, singing, and baseball, the CornBelters beat the Rockford Aviators 13-3.



Community Players members sing "Take me out to the Ballgame" at the August 18 CornBelters' game.

90 Years of Theater: The History of Community Players (Part 8)

by Bruce Parrish and Bob McLaughlin

The Newsletter continues our history of Community Players' first 90 years. Part 7 left us in 1997 with preparations for the 75th anniversary season underway.

Community Players began its 75th season with the gala opening of the classic Broadway musical *My Fair Lady* by Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe. All the shows this

season had important corporate sponsors; this show was sponsored by State Farm Insurance. As a special offering for the opening and closing nights, Jeff Norton, banquet captain for the Radisson Hotel in Bloomington, provided hors d'oeuvres for audience members. Patrons entered to a newly redecorated lobby, rest rooms, and the Dick Brown Green Room. The *Pantagraph* wrote " 'My Fair Lady' was a

remarkable achievement. . . . The cast of 37 actors, 16 orchestra members and a huge staff of other volunteers have created an elaborate production, marked by countless time-consuming details. . . . Volunteers include newcomers and folks who have been involved at Players for two, three and even four decades." *My Fair Lady* had first been performed at Players in 1978.

Closing out the season was a revival of the musical *1776*, which marked the directing debut of Sally Parry. There were two connections with Players' original 1976 production. They used the same scrim, a curtain that can show figures when lit from behind, to show the names of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. There were also four actors from the earlier production: Scott Myers, Bruce Parrish, J. D. Scott, and Gayle Thomas.

To celebrate the millennium, the 1999-2000 season was themed "A Century of Theatre." The first show of 2000 was a revival of *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. During the opening number, "Comedy Tonight," the cast assembled Gary Schwartz's set, with the last piece put in place with the last note. *Jesus Christ Superstar* featured a cast of 40 and an orchestra of 44. The show had a high-tech, modern-dress, and rock-concert approach. Four television monitors were mounted on each side of the proscenium.

The theme of the 2001-2002 season was "Classics Old & New." Due to the demand for tickets, the number of performances for musicals was raised to twelve and the number for plays to eight. The first show, *Man of La Mancha*, opened two days after the attacks of September 11. In the *Pantagraph* Marcia Weiss wrote of the silence

of the opening night patrons outside of the theatre, hearing a plane fly by and someone quietly cheering it on. In the lobby, near a framed picture of the New York City skyline, was a large glass goblet collecting donations for the Red Cross Disaster Fund. During this show, the Board of Governors honored longtime Players' actor, director, and board member Tony Holloway. The theatre lobby was rechristened the Tony Holloway Lobby. Presenting Tony with his award were Past Presidents Eddy Arteman and Nikki Phillips.



The cast of *Show Boat* from the 2002-2003 season.

In January 2002, during performances of *Pump Boys and Dinettes*, audience members had the chance to win homemade pies and car air fresheners in three varieties. Local celebrities, such as Twin City mayors, school

superintendents, fire and police chiefs, and radio and television personalities had their photos taken with the girls of the Double Cup Diner for display in the lobby.

Opening the 2002-2003 season was a revival of *Show Boat*, the show that made the building of the theater possible. The production featured 67 performers. During one of the Sunday matinees of *42nd Street*, the power went out just before curtain time, due to the ill-fated meeting of a curious squirrel and a transformer. Patrons were accommodated at other performances. Opening weekend, because of an emergency, director Alan Wilson had to play the part of Pat Denning, suitor to the leading lady of the show.

On the opening night of *Gypsy*, Oct. 24, 2003, the switch was thrown on Players new, \$110,000 lighting system, replacing the 35-year-old system. The new system tripled the lighting capacity and also increased the subtlety with which a scene can be lit.

During the run of *Gypsy*, longtime Players and community arts figure Tony Holloway passed away on November 1, 2003, at the age of 81. Tony spent 44 years with Players, including two years as President. He continues to be missed.

Players Gets Grant

The Illinois Arts Council has awarded Community Players a grant of \$3,550.00 from State funds for general operating support. This award, as it has in the past, will help with creating a wonderful season. We're very grateful for their continued support.

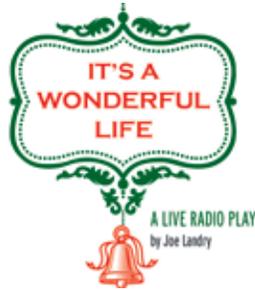
***It's a Wonderful Life* Comes to Community Players**

It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play by Joe Landry comes to Community Players December 12-15. Based on the 1946 movie which starred James Stewart, Donna Reed, and Thomas Mitchell, this version is done as a radio play with the actors on stage before the microphones, the Foley operator (sound effects person) on a side stage, and the audience in the house as though they were present at a broadcast of the show.

The story takes place on Christmas Eve, when George Bailey learns that his uncle has mislaid the funds of their building and loan company and faces certain ruin. He tries to commit suicide so his wife can collect his life insurance, but he is rescued his guardian angel, who shows him how valuable he is to the family and the community and what a difference he has made in the world. The radio show is set on Christmas Eve, 1946, at station WBFR in New York.

A minimum of five actors are needed (3 men, 2 women) to play a variety of parts. The actors playing George and Mary, his wife, play their younger and older selves, while all other cast members will be playing many different roles.

Auditions will be Saturday and Sunday, October 26 and 27, at at 7 p.m. There will be a lot of reading from the script to see how well actors can move among different roles and voices. This show is sure to be an audience favorite and should be both fun and challenging for those involved. Director **Sally Parry** and producer **Dorothy Mundy** look forward to seeing you there.



In Memorium: Larry Connolly

Lawrence E. Connolly passed away on Friday, July 12th in Bloomington. Larry's love of theatre led to more than a decade long association with Community Players. Larry was an actor, director, producer, scenic designer, and builder of sets. He loved to mention that he also swept the floors and then drank coffee.

Larry's first appearance at Players was playing Roy Hubley in 1978's *Plaza Suite*. That season Larry also appeared at Col. Pickering in *My Fair Lady* and Senator Austin in *The Last of Mrs. Lincoln*. Larry played Norman Thayer for the 1984 production of *On Golden Pond*. Larry's last job with the Players was as director for *A Member of the Wedding* in 1994.

Larry was on the Board of Directors, as it was called at the time, and a President from 1982-1984. Larry help to organize the Buy-A-Seat campaign to replace the original old red seats.

There are many funny stories to share about Larry, but I have always enjoyed this one. Larry was directing *Carousel*, one of his favorite musicals. He asked me to help him out and play the sea captain who appears at the end of Act I. One night in performance, Larry took over for an actor who had dialogue with me and said, "Don't worry, I know his lines." So we march onstage ready to speak of the dead Billy Biglow, when Larry forgot to say his lines, so I spoke his lines and ended with mine. He was busy looking like Bambi in the headlights. At the curtain, he turned to me and said, "Well, we covered that well, didn't we!"

—Bruce Parrish

... *Arsenic and Old Lace* Preview continued from page 1

Dorothy Mundy is in charge of properties, and **Wendi Fleming** is the house manager.

The set was designed and built by the team of Jeremy Stiller and Hannah Kerns. It is an ambitious one. At the August 23 rehearsal the set was still under construction, but I counted no less than three doors and a pair of functioning French windows. There is a long set of stairs that is used frequently by the cast. I suspect by the end of the run, some of the cast members will be wishing that the Brewsters lived in a ranch.

The pay-what-you-can Preview Performance is Thursday, September 5. Regular performances are September 6-8 and 12-15. *Arsenic and Old Lace* is good family fun, but the little kiddies may be a bit scared of the bad guys. I know I was!



From our 1984 production of *On Golden Pond*. From left to right: Hilda Gummerman, John Wiseman, and Larry Connolly.