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January, 2010

Community Players Presents *Dearly Departed* – A Hilarious Undertaking

by John Lieder

Community Players offers something a little different this winter with their production of David Bottrell's *Dearly Departed*. Not your standard two-act comedy, *Dearly Departed* consists of 17 scenes, or rather, vignettes, that tell the story of the passing and eventual planting of the Turpin family's patriarch, Bud. Full of vivid characters, the play, which takes place somewhere south of the Mason-Dixon line, is chock full of hilarious and occasionally poignant moments. It promises to be thoroughly entertaining.

Nancy Nickerson portrays Raynelle, the widowed matriarch of the Turpin clan. Her sons, Ray-Bud and Junior, are played by **John Lieder** and **Joe Strupek**, respectively. Her daughter, Delightful, a young lady of few words, is (sorry) "delightful-ly" portrayed by **Kelly Slater**. Ray-Bud and Junior's spouses, Lucille and Suzanne, are played by **Dana Spies** and **Reena Rhoda**. Other family members are Bud's Bible-thumping sister Marguerite (**Bobbie Hynes**) and her philosophical, unemployed son, Royce (**James Martin**). Each family

member has his/her own unique idiosyncrasies that contribute to the hilarity.



Various family friends and community members are no less idiosyncratic, including Yam Queen Juanita (**Wendi Fleming**), Ray-Bud's boss Clyde (**Paul Vellella**), the elderly couple Veda and Norval (**Betsy McDaniel** and **Dave Lemmon**), and the prolific Nadine (**Jennifer Mullinex**). Some of these characters are in only one scene, but the actors certainly make the most of their time on stage. Although the whole show is very funny, these scenes are side-splittingly hilarious.

A special note needs to be made of the appearance of **Phil Shaw**, who portrays Rev. Hooker. A frequent director at Players, his velvet baritone is put to fitting use as the preacher, and his portrayal alone is worth the price of admission. The Reverend is backed by his "Joy of Life" singers: **Christie Vellella**, **Cris Embree**, **Jim Kalmbach**, **Bobbie Hines**, and **Chris Strupek** (Jan. 15 & 16).

The show is also blessed by strong contributions from a number of CP first timers. **Bobbie Hynes**, **Betsy McDaniel**, **Jennifer Mullinex**, and **Chris Strupek** are all making their first (of, we hope, many) appearances on the Community Players' stage.



James Martin, Bobbie Hynes, Nancy Nickerson, Dana Spies, and John Lieder try to pick a casket in a recent rehearsal of *Dearly Departed*.

... continued on page 4.

COMMUNITY PLAYERS
Calendar

March - April 2008

Board Meetings

Jan. 12 6:00 p.m.
Feb. 9, 6:00 p.m.
Community Players Theatre

Dearly Departed

Preview: Jan. 7
Shows: Jan. 8-10, 14-17, 21-23

Side by Side by Sondheim

Auditions: Jan. 11, 12
Shows: March 25, 26, 27

Play it Again, Sam

Auditions: Jan. 18, 19
Preview: March 4
Shows: March 5-7, 11-14, 18-20

Tickets can be ordered online at
www.communityplayers.org.
Click on "Online Ticket Sales."



Community Players

201 Robinhood Lane
Bloomington, IL 61701
309-663-2121
www.communityplayers.org

Newsletter Committee

Jim Kalmbach
Barb Lemmon
John Lieder
Bob McLaughlin

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 mem-
bers of Community Players.

For information about joining us,
please contact our membership
chair, Barb Lemmon at
barb.lemmon@comcast.net.

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

Play it Again, Sam Auditions

Play it Again, Sam, a 1969 romantic comedy by Woody Allen, segues between reality and fantasy in the world of film critic and movie buff Alan Felix in his Greenwich Village New York apartment. As the play begins, Alan's wife has just left him, claiming that he is just too boring to live with. Alan is a neurotic hypochondriac, and his relationships with women have been total disasters. Then Alan is visited by an imaginary Humphrey Bogart, who, Alan hopes, will teach him how to woo and win women. Bogey advises him that he has "never met a dame that didn't understand a slap in the face or the slug from a .45!" and that there was no heart break, not even that of Nick at the end of *Casablanca* that "couldn't be fixed with a little bourbon and water."



Following Bogey's instruction and assisted by Linda, the wife of Alan's best friend, Alan goes through a series of disastrous and short relationships with a parade of members of the opposite sex. When he finally realizes that he is falling for his friend's wife, Alan again turns to Bogart for help.

There are roles for 3 men and 7 to 8 women. One of the male roles is that of the imaginary Bogart, but we will be looking for Bogart mannerisms and not necessarily the voice or appearance. The other two male roles are for ages 25 to 35 and will be learning some Italian. There is one leading female role and she should be 25 to 35. The other 6 to 7 female roles are the supporting cast and can be from 21 to 40. The leading man should have strong comic abilities.

Auditions will be held Monday - Tuesday January 18 and 19 at 7 p.m. at Community Players' theatre. The show preview is Thursday March 4 with shows on March 5-7, 11-14, and 18-20. **Kameron Cox** is the director, and **Tom Smith** and **Hannah Kerns** are the producers.

For any questions contact Kameron Cox at future400@yahoo.com.

Community Players' Theatre Workshops

Community Players is sponsoring three workshops this winter and spring for the young and the young at heart.

Starting with Saturdays in February, Matt Drat and Katrina Whalen will be teaching **Improv: Storytelling Through Drama and Movement**. Open to junior high schoolers and older, students will learn to use their minds and bodies to create spontaneous stories. This is a class where anything can happen!

On Saturdays in April, Matt will continue by offering **Acting for the Stage**. Again this class will be open to Jr. high schooler and older. Both these

workshops will be held at Dance and Tumbling Sensations Studio.

In May, just in time for the summer auditions, Marcia Weiss is back with **Auditions 101**. This class is open to junior high school and high school aged students and will be held at the Community Players Theatre.

Registration for any of these classes is available through Heartland Community College and will be listed in their winter and spring catalogues. Look for our summer course—**Welcome to the Theatre**—in their summer catalogue.

A Spot of British Theatre

by Bob McLaughlin

One could start a good intercontinental argument over whether New York or London is the center of the English-speaking theater world. But why fight about it when you can find more first-rate theater in either place than you can take advantage of in the longest vacation?

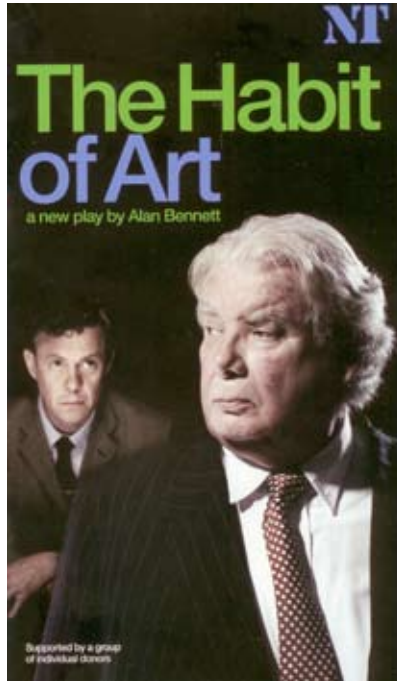
Sally Parry and I had a week in London in early November for an academic conference, and it gave us occasion to reflect on the similarities and differences between the city on the Thames and the city on the Hudson. Some basics first. For those of us accustomed to the Times Square theater district, where thirty-some Broadway theaters and a couple of dozen Off-Broadway theaters are contained within twelve blocks, the London theater district, or the West End, is rather sprawling. Centered around Leister Square and Covent Garden, the various theaters can be found up and down side streets for many blocks, and the National Theatre, the city's government-supported theatrical showplace, is a long walk or a short Tube ride southeast from there, across Waterloo Bridge, on the other side of the Thames.

Most West End shows are significantly cheaper than Broadway shows. The top prices in New York are now over \$135. We paid full price for a hit show in London and the cost per ticket was about £50 or approximately \$85. There are also lots of half-price opportunities in various kiosks around Leister Square.

One drawback in London is that the playbills aren't free. Programs are £4 and up (about \$7). Another odd thing—vendors come into the house at intermission selling ice cream and other treats, like at a baseball game.

New York theater writers never tire of complaining how many Broadway houses are booked with transfers from London. (Back in the seventies, *Scrambled Feet*, an Off-Broadway revue, had a great time with this perennial lament in a song called "Everything Is Absolutely Better When It's British.") But I imagine London journalists whine similarly about American musicals: except for a few British warhorses—*Phantom*, *Les Miz*, *Oliver!*,

Blood Brothers—almost all the musicals playing in the West End are Broadway transfers: *Chicago*, *Hairspray*, *Wicked*, even *Legally Blonde*. At least Londoners can look forward to the dubious distinction of premiering in early 2010 Andrew Lloyd Webber's sequel to *Phantom*, *Love Never Dies*. (The *Phantom*, Christine, and Raoul all somehow end up in Coney Island—we'll have to wait till it gets to Broadway to find out the rest.)



One thing the two cities have in common is a mania for turning film properties into predigested stage pieces. Composer Alan Menken is represented in the West End by *Sister Act*, a musical version of the popular Whoopi Goldberg film. There is also a straight-play version of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, in which Holly Golightly is played by Anna Friel.

Due to conference obligations and some other sightseeing choices, we saw only two plays while we were in London, both very good and both originating at the National Theatre, where we have never been disappointed and where we never cease to wonder why there can't be this kind of government support for theater in our country. We saw the very first preview performance of *The Habit of Art*, the first play by Alan Bennett since his *The History Boys* swept the Tonys a few seasons back. It's about an imagined, late-life meeting between poet W. H. Auden and composer Benjamin Britten, both struggling with the problems of inspiration grown stale and audiences grown indifferent. Interestingly, we see this play in rehearsal, where the actors' challenges to the playwright and the stage manager's scolding of the actors complements the theme of creating art. Auden is played by *Harry Potter* regular Richard Griffiths. We also saw *War Horse*, about a horse and the lad who raised him going off to fight in World War I. The story's predictable (war is hell, you know), but the puppetry and the stagecraft in general are amazing.

There's much more to say about the juxtaposition of Broadway and the West End. More on-site research is definitely required.

. . . *Dearly Departed* preview continued from page 1

The set is minimal. Act I consists of some tables, chairs and a sofa to represent the Turpins' homes, and director **Brian Artman** has procured a seat from a salvaged car to use for a couple of scenes that take place in transit to the funeral. A table and actual church pew represent the studio of Rev. Hooker's radio show. Except for one scene, Act II takes place at the Depew Funeral Home. The casket, which "appears" downstage center, is represented by a couple of planters and special lighting. Wooden chairs are set up for the guests. The only other set piece is Raynelle's bed. Brian and **Jeremy Stiller** were able to build that and the rest of the set pieces in about a day.

Chris Strupek is producer. **Dan Virtue** is doing the lighting and sound effects design and **Rich Plotkin** is doing the sound design. **Cathy Sutliff** is costumer, and **Carol Plotkin** and **Dorothy Mundy** are in charge of properties. **Judy Stroh** is stage manager, and **Jean Lieder** is house manager.

The pay-what-you-can preview performance is January 7. Regular performances are January 8-10, 14-17, and 21-23. As usual, evening performances begin at 7:30 p.m., and Sunday matinees are at 2:30 p.m.



Dance Association Open House at the Theatre

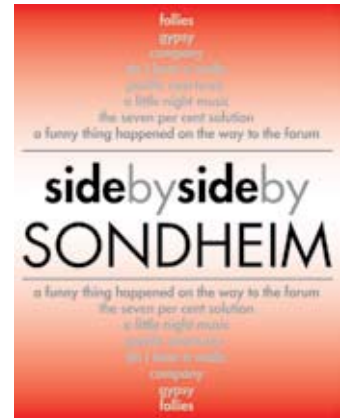
Community Players Theatre was the venue for the McLean County Dance Association's Open House on the afternoon of December 13. Dancers of all ages demonstrated a wide variety of styles during the two hour event.

The MCDA was very happy with how well the theatre met their requirements and looks forward to possible future co-ventures with us.



Side by Side by Sondheim Auditions

Stephen Sondheim recently received a Tony Award for Lifetime Achievement; however, one could argue that he had earned two or three of them by that point in his career. A case was certainly made as far back as the late 1970's, when not only had Sondheim been the honoree of a tribute concert, but the musical revue *Side By Side By Sondheim* had gone up in London. Sondheim's work as a lyricist had been on display since *West Side Story*, and his composing had entered the theatre community's consciousness with *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*.



Community Players has been proud to mount productions of several instances of Sondheim's work, and we are especially proud to bring our first-ever production of *Side By Side By Sondheim* to the theatre on March 25, 26, and 27, 2010. Director **Sherise Kirvan** (supported by assistant director **Sally Parry**, musical director **Chad Kirvan**, and producer **Ted Ichnioski**) is excited to be bringing this revue to Central Illinois, but she is aware of a great truth: you can't put on a show without good actors!

Auditions for *Side By Side By Sondheim* will take place on January 11 and 12, at 7 p.m. at the theatre. Sherise will be looking to cast 3-4 women and 2-3 men in singing-only roles; the only spoken dialogue is given by a male narrator, which, in contrast, is a non-singing role. Age 18+ is required for all roles. For auditions, bring your own music and be prepared to sing the entire song if necessary. There is no requirement that it be a ballad, up-tempo, etc. The important ingredient is interpretation! Reading will only be part of the audition if you want to be considered for the Narrator role.

We look forward to a great turnout and some incredibly hard casting decisions to make! For more information, contact Sherise at 309 821-0038 or songdancekirvans@comcast.net.



Members Carol Up Town

On Sunday, December 20, eighteen Community Players members and their families carolled at various uptown Normal businesses from 1-2 p.m. Led by Cathy Sutliff, a splendid time was had by all.