

CP Stage Set for 2006-07 Season Opener *Over the River and Through the Woods*

By John Lieder

The theme for Community Players' 2006-07 season is a "Season of Changes" and as our website announces, "Our 84th season brings together a collection of shows dealing with changes in people, society, and our ways of thinking." Fittingly, the season opener, *Over the River and through the Woods*, discusses change in a big, big way. In this play, we deal with societal changes, changes in attitudes regarding family obligations, physical changes due to the aging process and even changes in technology.

Author Joe DiPietro treats these subjects in hilarious and poignant ways via the relationship between 29-year-old Nick Cristano (**Jason Cook**) and his four Italian-American

It is vital in community theatre to have a healthy mixture of experience and new blood, so it has been an objective of mine when previewing productions to highlight and welcome new talent to the Players' stage. This production has a cast of only six actors, but we do get to welcome one newcomer.



In this case, the new blood comes fortified with Geritol®. Giving his debut performance at CP is **John Conterino** as Grandpa Nuncio Cristano. Mr. Conterino is a Bloomington-Normal long-timer. He's one of those types of people we cherish at CP, a long time patron who mustered up the courage to audition for a show and ends up doing a terrific job and having a great time doing it.

Kay Mullins plays Nuncio's wife, Emma. Kay comes to us from Lincoln where she recently also performed the role of Emma at Lincoln Community Theatre where, according to Kay, the show was very well received. This is Kay's second production at CP: She was in the 1999 production of *The Women*.

Over the River marks the second production as well for **Hannah Summers**, who plays Caitlin O'Hare, the young woman who has been invited to Sunday dinner in an effort to solidify Nick's roots and hence prevent his move to Seattle. (The scheme doesn't work, but for reasons Nick doesn't suspect.) It's been a busy past few months for Hannah who comes directly from this past summer's production of *Beauty and the Beast*. This is her first speaking role.

(Continued on page 4 . . .)



Grandpa Frank extemporizes the blessing before Sunday dinner. Cast members are from left to right: Kay Mullins, John Conterino, Bruce Parrish, Penny Wilson, Hannah Summers and Jason Cook.

grandparents. Nick's parents have retired and moved to Florida and cross-generational bonding has occurred via every-Sunday-dinners kept religiously by Nick and both sets of grandparents. The plot thickens and the scheming begins after Nick announces (with great difficulty) his intention to accept a promotion that would relocate him to Seattle, Washington – that's the "far away Washington, not the near one."

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COMMUNITY PLAYERS Calendar

September- October 2006

Board Meetings

September 12, 6:00 p.m.
October 10, 6:00 p.m.
Community Players Theatre

Over the River and Through the Woods

Preview: Sept. 7
Shows: Sept. 8-10, 14-17, 21-23
Community Players Theatre

Sugar

Auditions: Sept. 10-12.
Preview: Nov. 2
Shows: Nov. 3-5, 9-12, 16-19.



Community Players

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Newsletter Committee

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We are always looking for writers,
artists, designers and story ideas.

Send comments and suggestions to
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Curtain Calls is published seven times
a year for the voting members of
Community Players. To become a vot-
ing member, you must have worked
on any production during the last five
years. For more information, contact
the membership chair, Roland
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Back issues of *Curtain Calls* are
available on the Community Players
web site.

SUGAR AUDITIONS, SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 10

The American Film Institute ranked the 1959 Billy Wilder movie *Some Like It Hot* as the funniest American movie of all time. *Sugar* is the musical based on this now classic film. It began its Broadway run of 505 performances in 1972. Often referred to as a "hidden gem" of musical theatre, *Sugar* began a national tour in 2002 and features music by Jule Styne (*Gypsy*, *Funny Girl*) and lyrics by Bob Merrill (*Carnival!*, *Funny Girl*)



Set in Chicago, it follows the (mis)fortunes of two out of work musicians Jerry and Joe, who stumble into the St. Valentine's Day Massacre and then must hotfoot it out of town to escape the devilish gangsters hot on their trail. They wind up in an all girl band as "Daphne" and "Josephine" where they both become enamored of the lead singer, one Miss Sugar Kane (played by Marilyn Monroe in the movie). What follows is a series of antics and escapes including a group of naughty old men, fun on the beach in Miami, and at least one engagement.

Director Deb Smith and Musical Director Melody Palm report that there are roles for twelve men and eight women, ages 18 and up. Those auditioning should prepare and bring sheet music for 16-24 bars of an up-tempo number. An accompanist will be provided. No CD's or a capella accompaniment will be allowed. Actors should dress for movement for the dance audition and will be asked to read from a script.

Please note that auditions run **Sunday through Tuesday** September and begin at 7:00. Actors should arrive 10 – 15 minutes early to complete the audition form.

Community Players to Present Staged Reading of *Amadeus*

Community Players will sponsor a staged reading of Peter Shaffer's Tony Award-winning play *Amadeus* on Saturday, September 9, at 2:00 PM at the McLean County Arts Center in Bloomington.

In connection with a new exhibit, "The Art of Scenic Design: Curtis C. Trout," honoring the longtime designer for Illinois Wesleyan University's theater program, the Arts Center has invited several local theater groups to perform staged readings of plays.

Amadeus, which was made into an Academy Award-winning film, tells the story of Mozart's adulthood and death from the point of view of the rival composer who claimed to have murdered him, Antonio Salieri. It explores such themes as where art comes from, what purpose does art serve, and man's relationship to God. It's an engaging who-dun-it, too.

Joe Penrod will play Salieri, and **Bob Manasco** will play Mozart. **Kristi Zimmerman** plays Constanze, Mozart's wife, and **Alan Wilson** plays the Emperor Joseph II of Austria. Playing a variety of courtiers and citizens of eighteenth-century Vienna are **Karen Clark, Bob McLaughlin, Jake Olbert, Thom Rakestraw, Matt Sergot, Deb Smith,** and **Tom Smith.** **Dave Montague** is providing the sound effects. The reading is directed by **Sally Parry.**

The McLean County Arts Center is located at 601 N. East Street in Bloomington. Admission is \$3.00, half of which will go to Community Players. For more information, call (309) 829-0011.

The Tale of a Fateful Trip or . . . The Debut

Roland Spies

The wife was pregnant and more than showing. We knew, she and I, that there wasn't much time left for us to travel and have fun with just the two of us before the serious cocooning would begin at home. New York seemed like just the sort of blaze of glory we were looking for to close out the pre-shut-in period. A quick weekend, see a show or two, a couple of nice meals at fancy places, a plush hotel—a real non-kid weekend—that's what we had in mind. But it turned out a lot more memorable than that.

I had read in *The New York Times* and some other outlets (notably Terry Teachout's rave in *The Wall Street Journal*) about this show that had just moved to Broadway—*The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*. It sounded like a real hoot so I got tickets online and we looked forward to it as one of the expected highlights of our weekend. I mentioned to my wife that one of fun aspects of the show was that they actually picked out a few audience members to join the actors onstage each night to be part of the Bee. That would be something, to see those amateurs sweating under the hot lights of a Broadway stage.

When we arrived at the theater, there were staff members mingling with the audience in the lobby. They would approach people and ask them if they would be interested in being in the Bee and then they filled out a very short questionnaire. They said that they would choose four people as a cross-section of the audience and that the four would be announced at about ten minutes before curtain.

I told my wife that because the interviewer had done her job in the most perfunctory manner possible, I thought I had no shot. (I may simply have been misinterpreting ordinary New York behavior.) I almost did a spit take on the last gulp of my pre-show cocktail when they called my name out of the dozens of people with whom they had talked.

The four of us selected got hustled into the tech booth at the back of the house and were given very brief instructions which primarily consisted of how to get to the stage at the conclusion of the opening number and to be sure to ask for a definition for each word we were given and that it be used in a sentence. Finally, they said to just follow the actors' leads and to be ourselves. We all took our seats and waited for the

end of the first song at which point our names were called and we walked up and sat on the bleachers.

All four of us intermingled with the real actors and each got an easy word to spell. Despite the softball, one ringer choked immediately, but that got a big laugh from the audience.

We got to do a production number with simple movement (not quite dancing, which was good call for me) and also sang along with the cast. For the second round of spelling, I watched as both of my audience buddies were called up, given killer words and then got sent packing back to their seats.

So there I was, the lone guy not being paid to entertain that night. Before they called me again, we went through one more song where one of the pro's got knocked out, as well. Then I got called back up to the mike. The word was "vigintillion," meaning

"twenty million." Somehow I spelled it correctly and got an enormous cheer from the audience. I know that word was intended to eliminate me, because in a moment of excellent comedy timing the announcer waited until I got all the way back to my seat on the bleachers with the cast to call my name again. I tried to make a mock complaint without hamming it up too much and went back to the microphone where I got some medical term with about eight syllables and that was the nail in the coffin.

As I said, I ended up being the last of the audience members eliminated and spent almost a half hour on stage with the cast, including Dan Fogler who would win a Tony just a few days later. Then the "comfort counselor" gave me a big hug and sang me a sympathetic song and the whole speller cast followed me back to my seat and sang "Goodbye" to me. If you saw the Tonys last year, it was the same thing they did with Al Sharpton.

It was an absolutely amazing experience. It's hard to admit, but it was even better than being on the Players' stage.



Over the River preview continued from page 1

Rounding out the cast are Players veterans, **Bruce Parrish** and **Penny Wilson**. Bruce plays Grandpa Frank Gianelli, who introduces us to the concept of *tengo famiglia* ("I hold a family") and who is in continual denial of his declining driving skills. Penny portrays his wife, Aida, who never met a problem that couldn't be solved with the right food. Portraying the grandparents of a 29-year-old, Bruce and Penny are having fun *not* acting their age.

Bruce is also set designer and master builder for the production. His set comfortably transports us into the Hoboken, New Jersey living/dining room of Frank and Emma.

Over the River is directed by **Carolyn Beyer** with assistance from **Marilynn Geskey**, **Thom Rakestraw** and **Tom Smith**

are producers. Technicians are **Dan Virtue** on lighting design and **Gary Ploense** on sound. Theatre craft persons are **Opal Virtue** with costume design and **Teresa Kerber** on props with assistance from **Karen Wyatt**.

Another important aspect of this "Season of Changes" is the change in Friday and Saturday starting times: **Friday** and **Saturday** performances, along with **Thursday** performances, now all begin at 7:30. Sunday matinee performances begin, as always, at 2:30. Performance dates are Sept. 8-10, 14-17, 21-23, 2006, with the pay-what-you-can Preview performance Thursday, September 7.

Pamela Shandrow Hits the Big Time

Bob McLaughlin

Many who tread the boards at the theater on Robinhood Lane dream of moving on to brighter lights and bigger venues. Community Players veteran Pamela Shandrow has turned her dream into reality, having been cast in the chorus of the national tour of Andrew Lloyd Webber's megahit *The Phantom of the Opera*.



Around the turn of the last decade, Pamela, the daughter of two terrific local actors, Don and Kathy Shandrow, was a regular in Community Players productions, appearing in major roles in *The Secret Garden*, *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*, *Sabrina Fair*, *Children of Eden*, and *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying*. Many of us remember how, for the opening night of this last production, she had to rush to the theater from her high school graduation, her "Rosemary" costume underneath her gown; she ran in the stage door, took a deep breath, walked onstage, and nailed her first song. There was no question that she was meant to be in show business.

After picking up some more experience in good roles at the Barn II Dinner Theater, Pamela moved to Chicago, started auditioning, and played roles at such theaters as the Drury Lane Oakbrook, Pheasant Run, and Beef and Boards.

In May Pamela was cast in a national tour of *Phantom*, the lush, romantic story of a deformed genius who lives in the bowels of the Paris Opera and who becomes obsessed with a beautiful young soprano. Pamela joins other denizens of the Opera in being terrorized by the Phantom. Her character is

the Page in the Phantom's act 2 opera, Don Juan Triumphant, but she plays many other roles throughout the evening.

Pamela has found this experience exciting, challenging, and rewarding. She says, "Touring with Phantom has been the pinnacle of my life so far. I have never learned so much, or felt a part of something as fully as I do here. The show first started on Broadway something like eighteen years ago, and the tour has been out for fourteen years, and I'm amazed at how many hundreds of people still come to see us every night—and how very appreciative they are."

Pamela joined the tour in Calgary and then moved to Vancouver. She is in Edmonton until September 24, after which she'll move on to Winnipeg, Albuquerque, Philadelphia, Toledo, Des Moines, and Toronto. Moving from city to city can be a challenge in itself. Pamela says, "Life on the road is very hard and takes a lot to get used to. You have to learn to live out of a trunk and pack up your things every month to move to a different place. You never know what the new theater is going to be like until you get there, not to mention housing or transportation. But I have to say that the cast and crew are fabulous and totally make up for everything else that's not so comfortable."

This tour has been a wonderful opportunity for a terrific young actress, and Pamela knows how lucky she is: "The show is an anomaly. There has been nothing like it previously and will probably be nothing to compare to it in the future. The stars all must have aligned for this one! I think that is the most spectacular thing about being part of the national tour of Phantom of the Opera. I'm part of the history now!"