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Vol. 8.1

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## **Community Players Are Doing It in Style with *Hairspray***

by John Lieder

It's fun, 1960's style with *Hairspray*, coming next to the Players' stage. Having sat in on the April 30 rehearsal, I can assure you that our production of the multiple Tony-Award winning musical boasts marvelous singers and dancers, top-notch choreography, and a cast that is devoting abundant energy to this wonderful score and charming story.

Leading the singing and dancing is **Kelly Slater** as the perky and pleasingly plump Tracy Turnblad, whose dream is to dance on the *Corny Collins Show*. When her dream is realized, she launches a campaign to integrate the show, making many friends and a few enemies (this is the 60's after all) along the way. Her love interest is the heartthrob of the *Corny Collins Show*, Link Larkin, played by **Jeremy Pease**. Tracy's parents are Wilbur and Edna. **Mark Robinson** is Wilbur and, following the



tradition set in the 1988 film and followed in the stage and film musical versions, our Edna is played in drag, charmingly so by Players veteran **Scott Myers**. Robinson and Myers are, well, darned cute together.

The antagonists are Velma Von Tussle, the racist producer of the *Corny Collins Show*, played by **Wendi Fleming**, and her bratty daughter Amber, played by **Mary Francis Leake**. Others in the cast are **Joe McDonald** as Corny, **Melissa Jean Mullen** as Tracy's best friend Penny Pingleton, **Gerald Price** as Seaweed J. Stubbs, **Katryce Bridges** as Little Inez, **Ingrid Myszka** as Penny's mother

Prudy, **Mary Everson** as the gym teacher, and **Sara Schramm-Bronson** as the Prison Matron and Principal. Space doesn't permit me to mention all the cast members (43 by my count), but I need to give special mention to my friend and co-worker **Chris Terven**, who returns to the Players' stage for the first time since February 2000 and plays Mr. Pinky and Harriman F. Spritzer. Jumping back in at the deep end, Chris is not only *in* the show but is also doing Properties. Welcome back, Christopher!! Also deserving special attention is **Jennifer Rusk**, back with us for the first time since 2007. Her powerful vocals are gonna shake the rafters and delight the audience.



Chris Terven as Harriman F. Spritzer addresses Wendi Fleming as Velma Von Tussle and the cast of the *Corny Collins Show*.

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COMMUNITY PLAYERS  
Calendar

May - June 2012

**Board Meetings**

May 15 6:00 p.m.  
June 12, 6:00 p.m.  
Community Players Theatre

**Hairspray**

Preview: May 10  
Shows: May 11-13, May 17-20  
and May 24-27



**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

*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."

**Summer Show Cancelled**

At the April Board of Governors meeting it was decided to cancel the summer show, *Legally Blonde*. We had great difficulty in finding a director and other staff. With the building more or less empty this summer, we will take the opportunity to spiff up the theatre in preparation for our 90th season. Quite a bit of cleaning and painting needs to be done. We will keep you notified via email and Facebook as work days are scheduled.



**History Mystery Contest!**

We had no official winners for last month's History Mystery Contest, though in conversation, **Kelly Peiffer** identified the show. The show was *Once upon a Mattress*, from the spring of 1986, and the couples, from left to right, were: **Kelly Davis** and **Bruce Parrish**; **Diane Walker** and **Pat Gaik**; **Kelly Hardesty** and **Alan Wilson**.

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!



**Historian's Corner**

In 1951 Dean Litt, president of Players, in his curtain speech at the production of *Life with Mother*, flubbed his lines and announced that Players last production of the season would be *Light Up with Mother*. What he meant to say was *Light Up the Sky*.

—Bruce Parrish

**2012/2013 Directors and Producers**

The Community Players Board of Governors has announced the following directors and producers for our 2012/2013 season:

*You Can't Take it With You*

Director: Jeremy Stiller / Producer: Joel Shoemaker

*Leaving Iowa*

Director: Sally Parry / Producer: Dorothy Mundy

*Irving Berlin's White Christmas*

Director: Deb Smith / Producers: Jean and John Lieder

*Lend Me a Tenor*

Director: Cris Embree / Producer: Jay Hartzler

*To Kill a Mockingbird*

Director: Marcia Weiss / Producer: Samantha Smith

*Monty Python's Spamalot*

Director: Brett Cottone / Producer: Chris Strupek

For more information, visit [http://communityplayers.org/shows\\_next.html](http://communityplayers.org/shows_next.html)

# Off Beat and Off Broadway

by Bob McLaughlin

On our trips to New York the last couple of years, Sally Parry and I have found ourselves, without really intending to, seeing more off- and off-off-Broadway plays. There are some distinct advantages to roaming beyond Times Square in search of theatrical adventure. First, off and off-off plays are usually quite a bit cheaper than your basic Broadway show. Second, most off and off-off theaters are not located along Broadway from 40<sup>th</sup> to 53<sup>rd</sup> Streets and thus give you the chance to see some different parts of the city, especially Greenwich Village. (Of course, not all areas of the city are equally tourist-friendly; check with the front desk of your hotel if you're uncertain.) Third, off and off-off shows are often a bit more daring or aimed at a more specialized audience than exorbitantly-capitalized Broadway shows can afford to be. Fourth, since Broadway producers frequently transfer successful off and off-off productions to the Great White Way, you can sometimes see the next big Broadway hit before most people have heard of it.

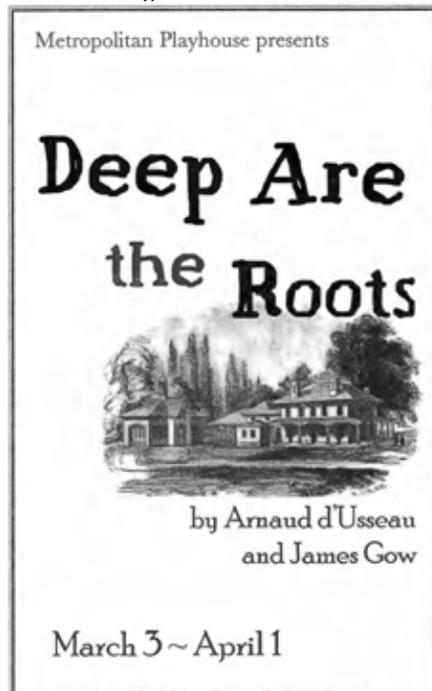
What makes a theater off-Broadway? It's not just a matter of location, it's a matter of size: an off-Broadway theater seats between 100 and 499 people. An off-off-Broadway theater seats fewer than 100. These distinctions are important because they affect the kinds of contracts the actors and stage crew sign and thus how much they're paid. Many of these off and off-off theaters are in spaces that were originally something else: churches, schools, gyms, offices. The theater spaces can be interesting and intimate—another advantage of off and off-off is that you can be very close to the actors and you can enjoy their unamplified voices. But beware: the rest room facilities can be, um, unpredictable. (Using your restaurant's WCs before the play can be a good idea.)

Here are some of our off and off-off adventures from a February and a March trip to New York.

We usually try to see whatever the Irish Rep is doing when we're in town. We've never seen a bad production there, and we've seen many excellent ones. Located on

West 22<sup>nd</sup> Street, between 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Avenues, the Irish Rep owns its own building, which houses a smallish rectangular stage, with a small amount of seating off the long stage-right side and most of the seating in front of one of the shorter sides.

There's a pillar at the corner of the stage separating the two sections of the audience; it's interesting to see how directors incorporate it into the staging. In February we saw *Beyond the Horizon*, Eugene O'Neill's first full-length play and his first Pulitzer Prize-winner. Set on a New England farm, it focuses on two brothers, one who's about to leave on a trip around the world working as a seaman on his uncle's ship, and the other who is at home on the farm. Owing to a last-minute romantic complication, they switch destinies, the farmer going to sea, the wanderer staying on the farm. Needless to say—this being an O'Neill play—neither is happy and tuberculosis makes an entrance in act 3.



The MCC Theater Company performs at the Lucille Lortel Theater on Christopher Street in the Village, a historic theatrical location. On the sidewalk in front, there are stars honoring the great playwrights whose work has been performed there. In February we saw *Carrie*, the first-ever revival of the notorious Broadway musical based on Stephen King's novel. The show has been much revised, and although a couple of weeks after we see it, the reviewers will not be kind, we like the score, staging, and performances, especially Molly Ranson as Carrie and Marin Mazzie as her mother. (As we pick up our tickets, Mazzie comes in the lobby to tell the box-office person that she's "drowning in phlegm." She still manages to sound great.) The highlight is the use of projections to represent the disaster at the prom—breathtaking.

The Metropolitan Playhouse is located on East 4<sup>th</sup> Street, between Avenues A and B. (If you see an evening performance, take a taxi back to your hotel.) The space is terrific: three steeply raked rows of seats on three sides of a living-room-sized playing area. In March we saw *Deep Are the Roots*, a 1945 play about a decorated

Continued on page 4 . . .

. . . *Hairspray* preview continued from page 1.

*Hairspray* is directed by **Alan Wilson** and co-directed and choreographed by **Wendy Baugh**. **Brett Cottone** is producer and **Kelli Beal** is Assistant Director. **Angie Schwab** is vocal director and accompanist. **Eugene Phillips** is Orchestra Director. **Jennifer Gallivan** is costumer with assistance from **Rachel Gramp** and **Ashley Moffitt**. **Claron Sharrieff** is stage manager and **John Cargill** is doing the lighting design. Sound design is by **Rich Plotkin** and Brett Cottone. Hair & Makeup Assistant is **Jessica Caruso**. The set is designed and built by **Jeremy Stiller** with assistance from **Hannah Kerns**. House Managers are **Sally Baugh** and **Audrey Myers**.

You'll notice some new names in the previous paragraph. There are quite a few newcomers in the cast as well. That's an exciting thing for the theatre. A hearty welcome to all newcomers and to those returning to the stage after an extended absence!

*Hairspray* is 90% fun and 10% social commentary. This is a show that couldn't have been done in the 60's; it wouldn't have been at all funny. Race relations have not gotten to where they should be in this country yet, but the fact that we can now laugh at mindless racism as the ridiculousness and foolishness that it is serves as evidence that we may be headed in the right direction.

*Hairspray* opens May 10 with the pay-what-you can Preview Performance. Regular performances are May 11-13, May 17-20, and May 24-27. As usual, evening performances are at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday matinees begin at 2:30 p.m.



### **Biographer of Sylvia Caldwell, Titanic Survivor, to Speak at Community Players**

Julie Williams, author of *A Rare Titanic Family: The Caldwell's Story of Survival*, will be speaking at Community Players on Saturday, June 30 at 7:30 p.m. Sylvia Caldwell was a missionary in Thailand who was travelling back to America on the *Titanic* with her husband and young son. All three survived, although she divorced her husband in 1930, became a secretary with State Farm, and eventually married her boss, State Farm founder George J. Mecherle in 1944. She was an active participant for years at Community Players. Bruce Parrish helped Williams with some of the information on Sylvia's work with the theater. The event is free and open to the public. Members of the *Titanic* cast and crew are especially encouraged to attend. Who knows, we all might break into song!

. . . Off Beat and Off Broadway continued from page 3

black serviceman who returns to his Southern hometown determined to buck Jim Crow. One might argue that the play is a little too well made (each character representing a specific position on race relations), but there's no doubting its power: twenty-first-century audiences still gasp at many of the lines.

Another of our favorite venues is the York Theater, located under St. Peter's Church at Lexington Ave. and East 54<sup>th</sup> Street and dedicated to producing new musicals and rediscovering old ones. In March we saw *Roadside*, a 2001 musical by Tom Jones and Harvey Schmidt (of *Fantasticks* fame). Set in the turn-of-the-century Oklahoma territory, it depicts the conflict between the forces of civilization (farmers, fences, and lawmen) and the free spirits who resist settling down. The score is gorgeous and the cast amazing. Before the show, we rubbed elbows in the lobby with Tom Jones, who also appeared with the cast after the show for a talk back.

There are many other off and off-off venues (including two more favorites, the Mint and the Keen) that are worth exploring. Next trip to New York, get off the beaten path and see what you discover.



### **Picnic to Kick Off 90th Season**

Community Players is holding a picnic at Fairview Park on June 2nd from 12:30 to 3:30 p.m. to kick off its 90th season. The 90th Anniversary Committee is providing meat and buns. Guests are invited to bring a dish to pass and yard games to play. More details about activities will be coming via email and Facebook.

We would like to get a head count so we know how much meat to bring, so please RSVP to Aimee Kerber at [aimeekerber1@aol.com](mailto:aimeekerber1@aol.com) or (309)706-5615.



### **Board of Governors' Election Results**

At the March annual membership meeting, the following people were elected to the Board of Governors:

**Wendi Fleming:** Membership  
**Jay Hartzel:** House and Grounds  
**Mark Robinson:** Playreading  
**Tom Smith:** Theatre Tech  
**Chris Tervan:** Treasurer