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July, 2013

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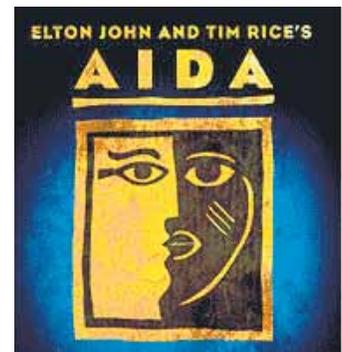
Community Players to Premiere *Aida*

by John Lieder

Aida, the Elton John/Tim Rice musical, comes to the Players' stage for the first time this summer. The story is a lovely little mixture of *Romeo and Juliet* and the old Boris Karloff classic, *The Mummy*. *Aida* opened on Broadway in 2000, ran for 1,852 performances and won 5 Tony Awards, including Best Original Score.

This time our star-crossed lovers are based in Ancient Egypt where the Egyptian captain Radames (played by **Austin Travis** and understudy **Chris Stanford**) falls in love with the captured Nubian princess Aida (played by **Jennifer Rusk** and understudy **Vicky Snyder**). Radames, however, is pledged to the Egyptian princess, Amneris (played by **Jennifer Stevens** and understudy **Kallie Bundy**). The antagonist is Radames' father, Zoser (played by **Mark Robinson**), who plots and schemes to see his son on the throne of Egypt and perceives the relationship between Radames and Aida as a threat to his goals. These four roles carry the bulk of the vocals for the show, with significant contributions from the Ramades' Nubian servant, Mereb, (played by **Tony Smith**) and the Nubian slave Nehebka (played by **Aimee Kerber** and understudy **Sequita Bridges**). **Robert Hackett** as Nubian king Amonasro and **Joey Knotts** as Pharaoh provide strong support in non-singing roles.

There is a sizeable (I count twenty) and very talented ensemble. As I watched the complete July 1 run-through rehearsal, one of my only disappointments of the evening is that the score does not provide the ensemble more of an opportunity to sing as a group. Their Act I finale, "The Gods Love Nubia", is powerful and marvelously performed and I wanted more. I was impressed that the entire cast was already very successfully "off book" two weeks prior to opening.



My other "disappointment" is that at this rehearsal I unavoidably did not get to see all the understudies perform. At the rehearsal I attended, Vicky Snyder was playing the role of Aida with Jennifer Rusk in the ensemble. If the other understudies live up to Snyder's standard, the audience should fear no falloff in talent when the understudies take the stage on Thursday evenings. Snyder's performance was polished, poised, powerful, and a true delight. I'm definitely going to see his show twice to witness a regular as well as an understudy performance!

Aida is directed by **Alan Wilson**. **Chris Terven** and **Mark Robinson** are co-producers. **JoLynn Robinson** is music director. **Wendy Baugh** is the main choreographer, with some help from **Aric Diamani**. **John Cargill** is doing lights and **Penny Wilson** is running the sound board, with **Rich Plotkin** doing the sound design. **Dorothy Mundy** is doing the properties



Mark Robinson as Zoser and Austin Travis as Radames face off in the musical number "Like Father, Like Son".

Continued on page 2 . . .

July - August 2013

Board Meetings

July 9 6:00 p.m.
August 13, 6:00 p.m.
Community Players Theatre

Aida

Shows: July 12-14, 18-21, and
25-28

Arsenic and Old Lace
Auditions: July 22 & 23
Preview: September 5, 2013
Performances: September 6-8 &
12-15



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Jim Kalmbach
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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.
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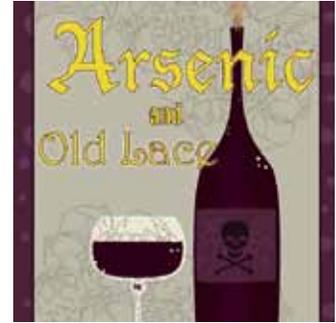
Curtain Calls is published six
times a year for the voting mem-
bers of Community Players.

For information about joining us,
please contact our membership
chair, Wendi Fleming at
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Back issues of *Curtain Calls*
are available on the Commu-
nity Players web site. Click on
"Newsletter Archive."

Arsenic and Old Lace Auditions

Two elderly darlings on a mercy killing spree, a wanted black sheep sadistic brother with an alcoholic plastic surgeon in tow, and last but not least another brother with schizotypal personality disorder who likes to bury bodies in the basement; out of context it sounds like something out of a "B" slasher movie. However when Joseph Otto Kesselring throws a young couple in love into the mix a wonderful comedic (if a little dark) play is the outcome.



Kesselring published around 12 plays in his lifetime. All drivel, except for *Arsenic and Old Lace*. Most figure he just got lucky with this one. I can't really say. *Arsenic* went on to become one of the truly great stage classics, balancing the morbid with comic genius. Large than life characters confound, yet somehow endear themselves to you. Its original New York run stretched for 1,444 shows. According to the opening night review in *The New York Times*, the play was "so funny that none of us will ever forget it."

Arsenic and Old Lace auditions will take place July 22nd and 23rd at 6:30. The show runs September 6-8 and 12-15 with a preview on September 5.

The cast will consist of 11 men and 3 women. Males will need to play from ages 20 and up. One of the women will need to play age 20 to mid 30's with the other women's roles playing ages 40 and up. The auditions will consist of cold reading with the possibility of other creative displays of your talent.



Historian's Corner

During Bleacher Bums rehearsals for the 1995-1996 season, we discovered that Jane Thomley knew of a young man who worked for the Cubs Marketing Department. We wrote to this young man seeking permission to copy an old program. We were given a letter to take to Kinko's that gave us the permission to make as many copies of the program as needed for the run of the show. Then we were allowed to keep an archival copy for our records, but had to destroy all others.



... *Aida* preview continued from page 1.

design. **Wendi Fleming** is stage manager and **Kelly Slater** is Assistant Director. **Christian West** is "Director's Assistant." Costumes are a joint effort between director Wilson and music director Robinson. The set consists of interesting set pieces rolled on to represent the various locations. It is designed and built by Chris Terven.

Aida is for the most part family friendly. There is mild violence and a few threatening situations, but the language is tame. The performances are July 12-14, 18-21 and 25-28. As usual, evening performances begin at 7:30 and Sunday matinees are at 2:30.

... *CP History Part 7* continued from page 3.

scheduled for ten performances, but an additional six were added to handle the demand. *Joseph* holds Players' all-time box office record. (It was revived in 2000 and 2007.)

The 74th season ended with a musical revue, *Broadway Our Way*, coordinated by Sally Parry and directed by Marcia Weiss, to raise money for the Theater for Young People Program. During tech week, Paul Dillow and Terry Dawson installed choir microphones, purchased through a Town of Normal Harmon Grant. Also at this time, Players refurbished the lobby to prepare for the 75th season.

90 Years of Theater: The History of Community Players (Part 7)

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

As part of the celebration of Community Players' 90th Anniversary Season, the Newsletter will offer the history of the organization. Part 1 covered the founding and the first decade. Part 2 looked at the second decade, 1934-1944. Part 3 surveyed 1945 to 1958. Part 4 covered the building of the Robinhood Lane theater and moves on to 1968. Part 5 took us up to the winter of 1977, and Part 6 ended with the installation of new seats in 1986.

The 1988-1989 season began with another face-lift for our stage. A new stage floor was installed during rehearsals for *Cabaret*. It saw double-duty right away: to bring the audience closer to the action, small tables were attached to the front of the stage and patrons could buy tickets to sit at stage level. *Cabaret* also began the tradition of corporate sponsorships. The final show of the season was *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, an audience-participation show, where near the end of the second act, audience members vote to determine who the murderer is. Thus the ending can be different at every performance.

The second show of the 1989-1990 season was *Blithe Spirit* (revived in 2011), for which Bruce Parrish cross-dressed to portray the medium, Madame Arcati. Also, the show was updated and brought into the video age by the use of television monitors to present the finale. For the sixth *Holiday on Robinhood Lane*, Players presented *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*, with a cast of 72, but only nine adults. Among the newcomers in this production were Marcia Weiss, Taylor Phillips, Elizabeth Parrish, and Chris Terven.

For the 1990-1991 season, the Board decided to create a unifying theme for which they could produce a brochure to distribute throughout the Twin Cities. The first brochure announced the theme of "Community Players Goes to the Movies" and included two season ticket packages: a four-star package to the four mainstage productions; and a six-star package to the four mainstage productions plus the choice of two of the three remaining productions. The opening show of the

season was *The King and I*, with a cast of 56, including newcomers Christie Vellella and Chris Fuller. The musical *Grease* featured Stuart Cartwright's innovative set: a 14-foot high jukebox, through which a battery-driven car could roll onstage. The floor was decorated with replicas

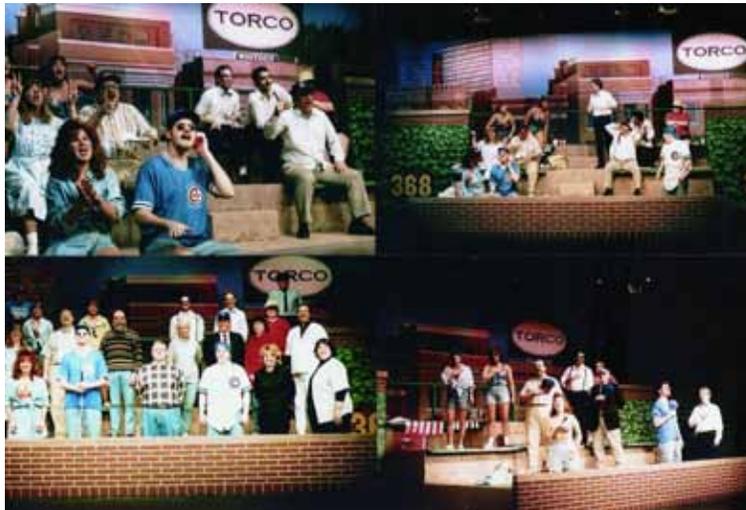
of 45 rpm records and memorabilia of the 1950s.

The 1991-1992 season was the first to see signboards announcing shows on the front of the building, through funding from the McLean County Arts Center and the Illinois Arts Council. Work also began on installing a new furnace and air-conditioning. When Players produced *The Royal Family* in February

1992, two actresses from the 1931 production, Ruth (Bower) Jeager and E. Melba Kirkpatrick attended the opening night and were introduced to the audience. Thanks to the new air-conditioning, Players was able to offer creative drama classes for young people during the summer, culminating in a production of *Peter Pan* in July. In summer 1993 there were workshop programs for children and adults. The adult class performed *Spoon River Anthology* in August.

The theme of the 1994-1995 season was "Broadway to Hollywood," and for the Tinsel Town comedy *Boy Meets Girl*, a film preview for the fictional film within the play was created. The opening show for the 1995-1996 season was *Little Shop of Horrors*, which required renting a set of puppets (at a cost of \$1000) representing the man-eating plant as it grows. The final giant plant required two people, Dave Schick and Stace Jenkins, to manipulate the movements. For the February 1996 production of *Bleacher Bums*, scenic designer Gray Schwartz used photos of Wrigley Field as the basis for his painted flats. Ushers threw Beer Nuts to the audience and hawked popcorn, candy, and soda prior to the show. The final production of the season was the hugely successful *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, directed by L. Jane Thomley. It was

Continued on page 2 . . .



A Successful 90th Season Comes to a Close

Community Players celebrated its heritage as one of the oldest continuously-operating community theaters in the nation with a variety of events in addition to its regular schedule of plays and musicals. We ended the season with a Gala on June 1 at Illinois State University's Alumni Center, a sold-out event. Many thanks to the entire 90th anniversary committee, but especially **Sally Baugh** for organizing the Gala and **Aimee Kerber** for coordinating the very successful silent auction, as well as **Opal Virtue** and **Sherry Bradshaw** for decorating the lobby with costum pieces from over the years. The 25 Cent Quartet (made up of **Kerry Myers**, **Chuck Palm**, **Joe Penrod**, and **Chuck Stuckey**) performed, followed by dj music and karaoke, courtesy of Sparrow Entertainment. A nice surprise for all the guests was the participation of **Bruce Parrish**, our historian, appearing via Skype from Georgia, to talk about the history of the theater.

Broadway to Bloomington, a musical revue specially created by **Sally Parry** and **Bob McLaughlin**, ran April 4-7 and looked back over our history through music. The performers were **Reena Artman**, **Cris Embree**, **Chad Kirvan**, **Sherise Kirvan**, **John Lieder**, **Bob McLaughlin**, **Bruce Parrish**, **Joe Penrod**, **Cathy Sutliff**, **Christie Vellella**, and **Kevin Wickart** with special guest appearances by **Sarah**

Page Ellis, **Kerry Myers**, and **Gary Schwartz**. The show was directed by **Sally Parry**, with musical direction by Chad Kirvan, and choreography by Sherise Kirvan.

On March 6, the original date on which Community Players started doing productions in 1923, the McLean County Chamber of Commerce presided over a ribbon cutting, followed by a reception, and then a staged reading of *Overtones* (1915) by Alice Gerstenburg, a one-act play that was the first production of Community Players, directed by John Lieder. The cast was made up of four women from the Board of Governors, **Cris Embree**, **Wendi Fleming**, **Sally Parry**, and **Opal Virtue**.

Other events of the 90th season in 2012 included a picnic at Fairview Park June 2, 2012, to kick off the special season; a presentation on June 30th by Julie Hedgepeth Williams, the author of *A Rare Titanic Family*, bracketed by songs from some members of our *Titanic* cast and crew, and a Cornbelters' game on August 13th where two members of the cast of *Hairspray* sang the national anthem.

Thanks to the entire 90th anniversary committee, chaired by **John Lieder**. The members included **Sally Baugh**, **Cris Embree**, **Wendi Fleming**, **Aimee Kerber**, **Kathy Parrish**, and **Chris Terven**.

