Starkville Community Theatre
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Letters

■ from page 1

ing to the State Theatre for another two nights as a dinner theatre production.

A three-course gourmet meal (the third course is dessert) will be offered Feb. 14 at the State Theatre, which is located in the International Bistro on Main Street. Reservations must be made for this special performance.

Tickets for Valentine's night will be $45 per person and will include champagne and roses – as well as dinner and the show.

A second show is set for Friday, Feb. 21. Tickets for the Feb. 21 performance will cost $40, and will include dinner and the show.

Last year's Valentine's dinner theatre, which featured a performance of Neil Simon's *Chapter Two* sold out, so make reservations early.

As in previous performances, veteran SCT actors Bob Anderson and Marsha Williams will read the letters that tell the story of an enduring, if volatile "courtship." Years of intimate, charming, funny, sad letters between a man and a woman, sometimes lovers, form the story line for the reader's theater piece by A.R. Gurney's.

Director Mary Eleanor Anderson said *Love Letters* was first produced in 1988 and has enjoyed "almost continuous performances entertaining and enchanting audiences with the story of a romance which follows two people through their lives from childhood, through their adolescent episodes into the trials of being adults."

Andy, played by Anderson, and Melissa, played by Williams, exchange letters, which describe their relationship of always being friends and sometimes being lovers.

The audience shares the laughter, tears, and joys of an enduring and charming love story; everyone who has ever been in love can relate to the events, which happen to Andy and Melissa.

"This is a show which takes on special meaning on Valentine's Day, a day set aside for lovers of all ages whether it be romantic love or an enduring loving friendship," Mary Eleanor said.

"SCT is delighted to be cooperating with State Theatre Productions and the International Bistro in bringing this fun and enchanting couple to entertain you," she said.

"We believe we are bringing audiences into a delightful experience with a special dinner, and a fun performance all rolled into a terrific way to celebrate."

To reserve your seat, please call the International Bistro at 323-2591 or 323-5056. Do not call the SCT box office for seats to this production. There will be no smoking in the restaurant or theatre during the two performances.

Grant

■ from page 1

according to their responses.

If the grant application is successful, SCT will campaign for the donation of the matching money for the projects.

If the application is not successful, SCT will need to campaign for money to do as much of the work as possible. A bank loan would allow the expansion project to go forward.

Arts Council grants winners are scheduled to be announced March 10. SCT is already benefiting from a small MAC grant that benefits the theater's general programming.

This $5,250 grant is helping SCT with printing costs for season brochures, tickets, and membership mailings and other general support for productions.

STAGE Write

JANUARY 2003 STARKVILLE COMMUNITY THEATRE VOLUME 1 ISSUE 2

SCT applying for $81,000 building grant

Multiple ideas, hours and efforts are being used to fill out a grant application that, if funded, would help fund the cost of many improvements to the Starkville Community Theatre's Playhouse on Main.

President Marsha Williams and the members of her executive board are refining the application to the Mississippi Arts Commission, which must be received in Jackson by Jan. 22.

The application requests a grant for $81,000, to be matched by $54,000 from SCT.

Work to be done includes: a major rear addition to the Playhouse that will provide storage and construction room for SCT's scenery; create a better-lighted, more comfortable, and more accessible "Green Room" where actors can dress and apply make-up; and provide for improved sound and lighting equipment and storage.

Lighting and sound improvements would include a catwalk for lighting and renovation of the "tech" booth. Other improvements would include flooring for the upstairs meeting room and some "cosmetic" upgrades.

The SCT Building Committee and the Executive Board asked for members to list their top priorities for improving theater operations and wrote the grant

■ See Grant, page 4

Love Letters to return to stage

Williams

A special, two-night "rerun" of Starkville Community Theatre's presentation of *Love Letters* is scheduled as a Valentine's Day gift from SCT and State Theatre Productions to the Starkville community.

The upcoming dinner theatre follows the successful collaboration between SCT and State Theatre Productions of last summer's *Big Time.*

The musical revue performed for sold out crowds at the Playhouse on Main before mov-

■ See Love page 4

Meeting Date Changed

SCT's next membership meeting will be Thursday, Feb. 13 at 7 p.m. The date was changed since *Marriage To An Older Woman* is running the first Thursday of the month..

Curtain rises on *Marriage* this Thursday

Marriage to an Older Woman, SCT's third showof the season, explores the outcomes of a sea cruise and sudden marriage between 60-something Carl (Edwin Ellis) and 73-year-old Babs (Marsha Williams).

This fast-paced comedy - which opens Thursday, Jan. 30, for an eight-performance run - also features Debbie Dunaway as Babs' daughter Freddy and Jay Cooper as Howard, Freddy's significant other.

Evening performances on Jan. 30 and 31, and Feb. 1, 6, 7 and 8 begin at 7:30 p.m. Matinee performances begin at 2 p.m. on Sundays, Feb. 2 and 9.

The first Sunday matinee (Feb. 2) is "Bring a Friend" day. All SCT season members may bring a guest for half-price admission.

Not only does the play explore Carl's and Babs' heretofore untold past, it

explores generational differences, contrasting Babs' and Carl's views of life with those of Freddy and Howard, whose relationship also has its complications.

"The overwhelming percentage of the play is rapid-fire one-line speeches," said director Bob Anderson. "John Fritz's play, performed by a Memphis theatre group, was the top show at the Tennessee Theatre Festival last year."

The cast has been in rehearsals since before Christmas and are excited about the fast-approaching opening night.

"This is a wonderful show and we have had a great cast to work with," Williams said.

The cast includes three veterans and one newcomer, according to Anderson.

Williams, Dunaway and Ellis have performed in numerous SCT productions, but Cooper will be making his debut at Playhouse on Main. However, despite his newcomer status with SCT, he has experience both onstage and backstage from his years in Nashville.

"The time to make reservations is now," said Pattye Archer, vice president for membership. "We have turned people away for the past two shows - don't miss out. Call 323-6855 today!"

News & Notes

Remember the Firsts! For every show that SCT produces, there is a **First-Night Party** held at the theater for actors, crew, and audience members.

The party is "catered" by SCT members and a small food budget and organized by Diane Ellis.

Drinks and finger-foods are set out in the upstairs meeting room and all First-Night participants are invited to drop-up and mix with the cast and crew.

It's a great opportunity to get behind-the-scenes information about the new show. It's usually also a good time to volunteer to help with the next show or some other theater project. The food ain't bad, either.

Another first to keep in mind is the **First Sunday** performance of the show.

Most of SCT's performances the second week of a show have been selling out recently, including the Sunday afternoon matinee.

So season members who miss the rest of the first week of the show are encouraged to bring a friend to the **First Sunday** matinee. (The First Sunday for *Marriage to an Older Woman* will be Jan. 2.) The friend will be able to buy a half-price ticket!

For First Sunday, as for all performances, season members are reminded to **Make Reservations Early!** It has happened that season members without reservations have found themselves without a seat. SCT does not want this to happen again, even though it can be considered a "price" of success.

SCT 'shows off' at 2003 MTA Festival

When people in Mississippi think of great theatre, they can't help but think of Starkville.

That's because Starkville just keeps producing great theatre – at all levels. And this year is no different.

Need proof? Just consider the 2003 Mississippi Theatre Association Festival, held Jan. 17-19 in Tupelo.

Starkville was represented by SCT, which performed in both the children's and community theatre divisions, and by Starkville High, which competed in the high school division.

Both SCT and SHS were honored for outstanding performances with several awards.

Three of SCT's *Over the River and Through the Woods* cast members received acting honors. Gabe Smith and Madeline Golden were named members of the All Star Cast. And Kathi Hester, who portrayed Emma in the touching comedy, was named Best Supporting Actress.

"We are so very proud of the entire cast and crew of *Over the River* for the outstanding way they represented SCT at this year's MTA Festival," said president Marsha Williams. "Dominic Cunetto has been involved with MTA for many years. In fact, the award for best high school production is given in his name each year. But this is the first year he has taken a show for competition.

SCT cast members Gabe Smith (from left), Kathi Hester and Madeline Golden won acting awards during the MTA Festival.

"And how exciting that MJ Etua's Project P.L.A.Y. was asked to perform for not just the children's theatre festival, but also as the showcase performance," Williams said.

"We are also proud of the students from Starkville High who were honored for their acting, as well as the entire cast and crew of Paula Mabry's *The Diviners*. Theirs was a wonderful show," Williams said.

In the high school division, Holly Hodges of Starkville High received the Best Supporting Actress Award, and Anthony Daniel and Josh Parsons were named All Star Cast members.

Of course SCTs involvement with MTA goes deeper than just the performances. Dominic Cunetto serves as historian; Etua serves as the Secondary Division Chair, and Stephen Cunetto oversaw the entire festival as president.

"We are proud of all of our involvement with MTA, but are especially proud of Stephen for his dedication and leadership," Williams said. "He was a terrific president and his leadership will be felt for years to come."

Cunetto named executive director of MTA

The Mississippi Theatre Association (MTA) joins the ranks of other statewide theatre organizations in the Southeastern Theatre Conference (SETC) that have hred an executive director.

Cunetto

Stephen Cunetto, a past MTA president, has accepted the part-time position following the Mississippi Theatre Association's 2003 Annual Festival.

Cunetto, who also served as president of SCT and the Starkville Area Arts Council, will handle the correspondence and much of the business of the organization, promote theatre within the State of Mississippi, assist in organizing and planning for the annual festival/convention and represent Mississippi at the Southeastern Theatre Conference (SETC).

"I am very excited about assuming the position of executive director," Cunetto said. "I fully believe in the goals of MTA and want to work toward improving the visibility of the organization within the state and the Southeast."

Other states have reported that membership in the organization dramatically increased after an executive director was hired. Cunetto hopes to have the same success with MTA.

MTA has been in existence since 1956. Cunetto's father, Dominic J. Cunetto, a long-time member of MTA and the recipient of MTA's highest award, The Cowboy Maloney Award, was president of assocation in 1984-1985.

"The Starkville community has benefited greatly from Stephen and Dominic Cunetto's leadership," said SCT president Marsha Williams. "Now the entire state will benefit from Stephen's dedication and hard work."

See http://www.mta-online.org for more information on the Mississippi Theatre Association.

Two women, two men needed for *Queen of Bingo*

Starkville Community Theatre is looking for a few Bingo players – or at least a few actors to play Bingo players!

Auditions for SCT's final production of the 2002-2003 season, *The Queen of Bingo*, will be held Monday and Tuesday, Feb. 3 and 4 at the Playhouse on Main. The show's cast includes two women and two men.

Director Pattye Archer describes the show as a comedy set in the gymnasium of St. Joseph's Catholic Church on Bingo night!

The action centers on Sis and Babe, two sisters on the other side of 50, who have been coming to Bingo for years. Sis is a good loser, but Babe loves to win! Sis is content with her widowhood, but Babe is still looking for love. In other words, they compliment each other in ways only sisters can and they drive each other crazy in that same sisterly fashion.

AUDITIONS:
FEBRUARY 3 & 4
7:00 P.M.

On the night the play takes place, Babe and Sis share something new as they each confess a secret and find a special kind of redemption.

In addition to Sis and Babe, the show also features Father Mac, the parish priest, and the Bingo caller, whom the audience hears throughout the show, but never sees.

"As with all of SCT's productions, the auditions are open to anyone interested in the show," Archer said. "We are hoping for a large turnout on both nights of auditions."

Archer said that Sis, the older sister, is described as a svelte senior citizen. Babe, who is 52, has always struggled with her weight. She is likeable and fun-loving but also irritable and on a sugar high.

Father Francis McKenzie Muldoon is any age, Irish and charming. And the caller, Archer added, is described as one of those "small town ladies' man" types who thinks everyone in the Bingo hall is there just to see – or more importantly, hear – him. He has a deep rich voice, which, in truth, does exude a certain charm.

"SCT has had a great season and *The Queen of Bingo* will be a fun way to wrap up our 25th anniversary year," Archer said.

"This is a show that will be almost as much fun for the audience as it is the actors. I am really looking forward to getting started."

Christmas a busy time at SCT

SCT held three community events to help celebrate the Christmas immediately past.

A group of SCT carolers, warmed by their Christmas spirits, their common urge to perform, and each other's company, went out to serenade some of their friends, families, and favorites again this year.

On the evening of Dec. 5, potluck offerings and SCT members started arriving at the Playhouse for the annual Christmas Party.

Tables were set up and decorations set out upstairs. About 40 people were there to share good food and good wishes for the holidays. Madeline Golden and Lyle Tate sang Christmas carols and songs for seasonal entertainment.

SCT's biggest, most boisterous, and best-attended Christmas event was a Children's Christmas Show co-directed by Pattye Archer and M.J. Etua.

Pattye and M.J.'s ever-changing, ever-expanding cast presented four performances Dec. 13 through 15. Cast members ranged in age from 3 to 15. They sang. They danced. When they weren't performing, they sat in clusters on the small stage and wrapped packages, cut out snowflakes and made Christmas ornaments for a tree they decorated at the end of the show.

> *'Christmas Central* was a lot of fun for all the children, crew and the audience!"
>
> ~ MJ Etua

This show was lively, and fun for everyone involved. It's true that the directors appeared to be a trifle "overworked and under-timed" by the end of rehearsals.

But it is also clear that children love to be on stage and their parents love to see them there. The children's "wing" of community theatre activities in Starkville is becoming a more important program offered by Starkville Community Theatre.

Fifth show promises to be 'not your average night of theatre'

As a part of SCT's 25th Anniversary celebration, a fifth production - a 2002-2003 season extra - will be staged at the Playhouse on Main in May.

The Complete Works of William Shakespeare [abridged] is a fast-paced, witty comedy by Adam Long, Daniel Singer, and Jess Winfield about three actors attempting a feat they believe to be "unprecedented in the history of theatre": to perform in one evening the entire works of William Shakespeare.

Bringing to the SCT stage a plethora of Shakespearean characters will be Thomas La Foe (*The Foreigner, Over the River and Through the Woods*), Gabe Smith (*Bus Stop, Over the River and Through the Woods*), and Lyle Tate (*The Exact Center of the Universe, Daddy's Dyin' (Who's Got the Will?)*).

"We're so excited to be able to perform …*Shakespeare*… at the Playhouse," says La Foe. "It's a great show full of laughter, fun, and audience participation"

The show incorporates elements of Shakespearean drama that many people already know but in a way few have ever seen before.

"Here are three average Joes portraying the characters of Romeo, Hamlet, Titus, and Antony in addition to Cleopatra, Juliet, and Ophelia just to name a few," Tate says.

"These are characters that have been so highly lauded and studied for centuries, but these particular portrayals will be in a completely different style than the audiences might expect."

Incorporating both Shakespearean dialogue and today's slang and style, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare [abridged]* is a fresh look at classic literature made accessible to everyone.

"Don't let the title fool you," cautions Smith. "This will definitely NOT be your average night of theatre. We promise lots of surprises, and who knows-you might even leave with a newfound love of the Bard!"