

EVERGREEN players

Spring 2003



Director Loves Process of Bringing Play to Life



You might think the greatest satisfaction for a director comes on opening night when the rehearsals are over and the performances finally begin. The point of the journey, after all, is to reach the destination.

This might be true for some directors but not for Lynne Elton Smith, who directs “Over the River and Through the Woods,” which runs March 28 through April 13.

“Opening night is great but it’s all about the rehearsal process for me,” she says.

What she loves most about directing is taking the basic ingredients and over time and through many steps bringing the play to life.

“You know, it’s like cooking,” she says. “You get this idea in your mind of what it’s going to be like and then, you know, it’s like you look at that cookbook and see the finished product and then you get to get there. So, I love getting there.”

Getting there starts months, even as much as a year in advance. She reads, reads and rereads the script. She types up the lines for each character to “figure out who this person really is.” In other words, she lives with the characters for some time “until you know them, until they’re a member of your family and you’re eating dinner with them.”

By the time she gets to auditions, which for “Over the River ...” took place a little more than eight weeks out, she knows what she’s looking for. The way someone looks and sounds has something to do with this – how they fit the character they’re auditioning for – but it’s even more about depth.

“An actor may audition and may not know the character very well but from their audition I can usually tell if I can get it out of them, if they can go there with me.” They have to have that depth because “I ask them to go a long way and push beyond their comfort zone.”

To understand Smith’s approach to directing, you should know that she’s a wonderful teacher and parent who has a natural talent for encouraging

(Continued on page 2)



Lynne Smith rehearsing “Over the River and Through the Woods,” opening March 28

Director: "You must know where you're going"

(Continued from page 1)

exploration while setting good boundaries. She knows how to create an environment of trust.

From the first rehearsal she promises the cast that she will not let them fail – that is, do less than create a character who lives and breathes. But she also will not let them phone it in. They must be willing to go beyond learning lines and blocking, to dig and to explore their character thoroughly.

"To be able to create an environment where they will push themselves, where they will take that risk and trust you and go out on that limb with you" is very important to her, she says.

Creating that trust takes time. That's one reason working in repertory and professional theater doesn't interest her much, because the rehearsal process is so condensed. It's the difference, she says, between buying the cake and making it. She'd rather make it.

Smith also is an actor and one who herself has considerable depth, whose emotions on stage ring true, as those know who saw her play M'Lynn in "Steel Magnolias" a few years ago. She knows what she needs as an actor, "so as a director I'm really paying attention to what my actors need from me, even if they don't know it."

To Smith, above all, the director has to have a vision and must be able to communicate it to everyone involved, cast as well as crew.

It's all in the preparation, she says. "If you don't know where you're going, you can't get there. You must know where you're going. You must be able to take people with you."

If she sees herself as a cook, bringing the ingredients together,

refining the flavor of the thing until it's just right, she also sees the play in musical terms and herself as a conductor.

"I feel the rhythm, I feel the tempo of the play and I know when it's going too slow or too fast or going at



Smith works with Donna Worley.

that pace for too long. It's just not interesting to hear a chorus sing one note."

She explains, "A character never has one emotion ever. You are not just happy. You are not just sad. You are not just angry. There are layers. If you go with just the sad or the happy you are short-cutting. Same with a play. It has layers." It doesn't work if you a show runs all at one pace or if a character's pacing is off compared to the others.

As a director her role is to get the actors to feel the rhythm of the play.

During an "Over the River ..." rehearsal she told the actors, "It's this beautiful orchestration that the playwright's given us." There are moments of comedy and moments of drama that each have to be there to make the whole play work.

"I mean, the whole play is setups and consequences, and if you just get the consequences but the setup has

been lost, it just doesn't have the impact." She has to know where those are and help the actors pay attention to them.

There are times in rehearsal when you can actually see her conducting — holding a pencil like a baton, mouthing the words along with the actors, watching every move, listening to every nuance. You can, in fact, watch the whole show on her face. She's a terrific first audience for her actors, attentive, completely focused on what they're doing. "You've got to care more about the actors more than getting the show on," she says.

Yet it's equally important for her to make sure the people working behind the scenes feel they're a part of the whole process. "They have to be as invested in the show as everyone else." That's one reason she started having "production dinners" — so cast and crew get to know each other.

To say that Smith has a passion for theater and for directing is more than an understatement. Wrapped up in the process, "when I'm not at the theater, the only thing I am doing is going to the theater in my head."

In a case of life imitating art, Smith, like the character Nick in "Over the River ..." has had to face the prospect of leaving family and friends. Just after the show opens, she'll be moving to Louisiana to join her husband Mike, who's taken a job outside of New Orleans.

She's served on the Board, directed, acted and for the past nearly two years she's been our administrator. Since 1998, she's been a very important member of our theater family, and we will miss her. We hope the next part of the journey is as fun for her as this part has been for us.

Meet the Delightful *Over the River* Family

Nick, 29 and single, still lives in Hoboken, N.J., where he grew up. His parents and sister have moved away, but every Sunday he dutifully shows up for dinner with his grandparents – Frank and Aida, Nunzio and Emma. One Thursday he shows up unexpectedly. He has news. He’s been offered a promotion. Trouble is, he’ll have to move to Seattle.

For his grandparents, good-hearted Italian-Americans who have worked all their lives providing for their family, moving for a job is incomprehensible. “*Tengo famiglia!*” as grandfather Frank is fond of saying. Family is the reason for living.

For Nick, of course, it’s different. “As any young man can tell you, the lure of a new life is as seductive as any lover,” he muses to the audience. He expects them to lay on the guilt. They have something else in mind and conspire to introduce him to the pretty and single Caitlin, niece of Emma’s canasta partner.

Playwright Joe DiPietro captures the classic American dilemma – family vs. career, to stay or not to stay – in wonderfully funny fashion. You don’t have to be Italian to fall in love with these grandparents who care for their grandson enough to meddle in his life. We can also understand Nick’s frustration with them, while being

miffed at him for not appreciating what he’s got in four people who can’t quite remember the rules to Trivial Pursuit or how to work the answering machine (“I threw it out,” says Frank, “Every time we pressed a button someone was yelling at us.”).

DiPietro, author of “I Love You, You’re Perfect, Now Change,” has a real knack for writing true-to-life dialog that has the audience roaring with laughter one minute and crying the next. Audiences likely will leave the show hungry for more family time or, with all the references to food (from lasagne to cannolis and much more), just plain hungry. Long before the story’s complete, we’re more than

willing to believe right along with Nick’s grandmother Aida that good food cures all (“Nicholas, don’t get upset,” she says during a crisis. “I’ll get a fruit bowl.”).

In the cast are **Kathleen Davis** (Emma), **Dan Halliburton-Link** (Frank), **Ted Jurasik** (Nunzio), **Gene Kato** (Nick), **Brooke Kennell** (Caitlin) and **Donna Worley** (Aida).

“Over the River and Through the Woods” runs weekends March 28-April 13 at Center/Stage. Call (303) 674-4934 for reservations or visit us on line at www.evergreenplayers.org.



Artwork by Renye Röss

Join Us for Chefs Cooking Classic on May 1

Sample the fare of some of the best chefs in Colorado and help your favorite nonprofit community theater in the process.



The Evergreen Players will again be one of the benefiting groups at the Colorado Chefs Cooking Classic Thurs., May 1 at the Denver Merchandise Mart.

This year’s theme, celebrating the event’s 10th year, is “Hollywood

Sizzles Part Two.” Nonprofits team up with a chef to compete for \$10,000 in cash prizes, ranging from Best All Around to Best Colorado Beef Dish. In 2002, Evergreen Players’ chef, Chris Rybak, won Best Beef and garnered our group \$3,000. There also is a silent auction. With some 15 organizations gathering items for the auction you can imagine what a great selection the event offers.

But the best part is the food and wine tasting. The chefs want to win,

so they pull out all the stops coming up with mouthwatering treats for the palate, and you get to try them all, if you can!

We’d love to receive your donation for the silent auction. Call (303) 674-4934 for information and tickets. Tickets are \$50 per person (\$40 is tax deductible).

Get your appetites ready and plan to join us for this taste-tempting culinary event at the Denver Merchandise Mart, Thurs., May 1 at 7 p.m.

Wanted: Aspiring Young Actors

Drama Camp for children ages 5-15 returns for its fourth summer, July 14-July 28. Here's a sampling of the sessions.

Space is limited. Register now. Call (303) 674-4934 for a brochure.

For ages 5-8:

"Aliens in my Garden" – Based on the play "The Garden Show," kids create their own play while learning improvisation and group-dynamics, as well as participating in basic acting, improv and movement workshops.

"Safari!" – Using story guidelines, kids create plays based on traditional folk tales from West Africa. They'll prepare these magical tales in thematic workshops to enhance acting and storytelling skills.

For ages 9-12:

"The XYZ Files" – Kids are in for an X-citing, Y-ummy, and Z-any experience. Along with rehearsal, kids participate in workshops on character development, improv, movement and group dynamics.

"We Come From Everywhere" –

Using a story guideline, kids create an original play about a group of kids on a cross-town train who wish they were going on a world-wide adventure, but soon discover the world can be found in the roots and stories of the people on the train.

For ages 13-15:

"Melodrama!" – Participation in this session guarantees a part in a one-act play (to be announced). Kids learn about one of the oldest forms of theater, while rehearsing and participating in specialty workshops designed to enhance their skills.



Artwork by Renye Ress

Oscar Gala — and The Winner is ...

If you've been to a show at Center/Stage, you know how congested the lobby can get. The Evergreen Chorale, the Players and Evergreen Children's Chorale are hosting a gala fundraiser for the lobby expansion project Oscar Night, Sun., March 23.

We'll roll out the red carpet at 5:30 p.m. at Mt. Vernon Country Club for hors d'oeuvres, dinner, a silent auction and the Oscar telecast on big screen televisions. Attendees will receive a ballot and will get a chance to pick the winners in the Oscar race. The most correct answers wins a \$500 cash prize.

Silent auction items include trips, wines, artwork, jewelry, clothing and more. All proceeds go to the lobby

expansion project. Architect's drawings of the expansion plans will be unveiled at the event. Highlights include 1,200 square feet of added space, a larger ticket counter and gallery space on the walls for displaying artwork from the Evergreen Artist's Association. The new lobby will be large enough to house meetings, receptions and other gatherings. The building also will gain about 800 square feet of much-needed storage space.

If you want to support Center/Stage as Evergreen's premier center for the performing arts, or if you just want to come out for a great time, please make your reservations now at (303) 674-4002. Tickets are \$60/single or \$100/couple.

THE BOARD AND STAFF, THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'

Announcing a few changes: Our administrator, Lynne Smith resigned effective March 1. After "Over the River and Through the Woods" opens she moves to Louisiana to be with her husband Mike. We thank her for her commitment and many contributions. We will miss you, Lynne, but now we have a reason to visit New Orleans.

Taking over for Lynne will be Kristin Andersen. President of the Players since November 1999, she resigned from the Board to finish Lynne's contract through March 31 when she becomes the business manager.

John Davis, who needed something fun to do now that a he's a retired United pilot, became captain, er, president of the Board on March 1. We feel confident having this 37-year Players veteran at the con and wish him the best of luck.

Peter Hughes, our artist in residence, has completed his two-year contract. He will direct "Cinderella" and our CCTC entry this summer. We hope he'll be working with us more in the future. We thank Peter for all his dedication and the vision he provided us. And how about that Trip to Harrisburg, er, Bountiful, er Bountiful Harrisburg? Thanks, Peter!

So, just in case you have your scorecards handy, here's the current roster: John Davis, president; Jan Hart, vice president; Molly Epstein, recording secretary; Shane Delavan, treasurer; board members: Karl Andersen, Din Manobla, Renye Ress, Davis Bennett, Kathleen Davis, P.K. Worley. Bennett, a ubiquitous cast member of late, joined the Board in December. Scott Ogle will fill John Davis' seat beginning in April. He teaches drama at Chatfield High School in Littleton and co-directed 2002's "Lost in Yonkers."