

December 2009



In the Wings

The Newsletter of The Concord Players

Editor: Robert Runck

DON'T MISS AUDITIONS FOR



Make your appointment now to audition for the Concord Players' production of the musical *The Scarlet Pimpernel!* Audition dates are December 8 and 9, 2009, at the Fenn School. Performance dates are April 23, 24, 25 (matinee), 30, May 1, 2 (matinee), 7, 8, 2010.

Auditions are by appointment. Please contact Joanne Hines at jbhines@gmail.com or 978-254-5578 for a 10-minute slot.

Go to the Players website www.concordplayers.org to fill out an audition form and see character descriptions.

Based on the 1903 novel by the Baroness Emmuska Orczy, a Hungarian royal living in Paris, *The Scarlet Pimpernel* takes place in 1792, during France's Reign of Terror when members of the French aristocracy were being dragged to the guillotine by an angry proletariat. Sir Percy Blakeney is a British baronet, whose patrician sensibilities are offended by the mass murder of his Parisian brethren at the hands of that rebellious and noisome Parisian rabble. He determines to rescue the nobles through the ruse of clever disguise and with the aid of his loyal comrades from London.

What follows is a musical adventure of derring-do as Percy and his band of fops travel between London and Paris, saving lives and restoring the beleaguered upper class to the extravagant wealth and privilege that was their birthright.

COME SEE



On his best day he's irascible, loutish and overbearing. He is Sheridan Whiteside, radio personality, theatre critic and discriminating connoisseur of all things posh or bawdy. Happily for Concord Players audiences, he is the extravagantly entertaining central character of *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, a 1930s comedy by George Kaufman and Moss Hart. Directed by Paul Murphy, the show opens February 12 on the stage at 51 Walden.

The absurdly comical characters and scenarios in the play are improbable, but very believable. This, most likely, because Hart and Kaufman based them on real people and events. Alexander Woollcott, nationally renowned theater critic and radio host of the 1930s, was a friend of both playwrights and spent a few weeks as a robustly impertinent houseguest on Hart's country estate. When leaving, he left a note saying, "This is to certify that I had one of the most unpleasant times I have ever spent." Later, Hart and Kaufman joked that the only thing that might have made the situation worse was if Woollcott had broken his leg and been unable to leave. From that brief but inspired thought came an award-winning and timeless comedy.

Banjo, an irrepressible show business friend of Whiteside, is based on the equally irrepressible Harpo Marx. Beverly Carlton, the show's dashing movie star, is modeled on Noel Coward, the real-life bon-vivant

of the 1930s social scene. Lorraine, the beautiful, melodramatic movie actress, is based on British star of stage and screen Gertrude Lawrence.

The plot moves quickly and improbably, appropriate to a comedy that is not quite farce, nor comedy of manners, just sufficiently ridiculous to ensure great merriment. A beautiful but desperate movie actress, a couple of convicted murderers, even a few penguins careen in and out of Whiteside's orbit, much to the chagrin of the conservative Stanleys and Whiteside's exasperated nurse Miss Preen. Whiteside's slightly daft and distracted doctor heightens the chaos and the comedy as the show comes to its breathless and hilarious denouement.

The Man Who Came to Dinner opened to stellar reviews on Broadway at the Music Box Theater in October of 1939, and became a blockbuster movie in 1941 starring Bette Davis and Monty Woolley. The Concord Players' production of the show promises audiences a night of fast-paced, intelligent comedy and welcome relief during a long and tedious winter. Opening-night ticket holders will be treated to a gala reception. Don't miss it, the penguins are coming! Rumor has it they'll be dressed in black tie.

Visit www.concordplayers.org for cast and crew information and tickets.

GEORGE KAUFMAN (1889–1961) AND MOSS HART (1904–1961)

Their collaboration lasted only 10 years, but Kaufman and Hart are among the most famous and successful collaborators in American theatre.

In 1929 Kaufman was an established and successful playwright when he agreed to review the script of a penniless, aspiring writer, Moss Hart, who had written a play about the transition of actors from silent film to talkies. They wrote and re-wrote, and within just one year created the most successful stage production of its time, *Once in a Lifetime*.

Their next collaboration, *You Can't Take It With You*, won a Pulitzer Prize, and later, as a movie, an Oscar for best picture. They wrote 5 other plays, all of which have been revived and re-staged over 7 decades. *The Man Who Came to Dinner* was their last collaboration.

In 1940, Moss Hart ended the partnership, needing to prove to himself that his success was his own and not just a result of his association with Kaufman. It wasn't. Kaufman and Hart both enjoyed professional success as playwrights for the rest of their lives. The two remained close friends until Kaufman's death in June, 1961. At his funeral, Hart delivered a tender and touching eulogy. Hart himself died just 7 months later in December 1961.

TRIVIA ABOUT *THE MAN WHO CAME TO DINNER*

The play remains one of the most frequently staged productions of American theatre throughout the country.

Alexander Woollcott played the role of Whiteside himself in a touring company of the play in 1940.

The star who played Whiteside on stage and screen, Monty Woolley, was once a drama teacher at Yale University.

Harpo Marx played the role of Banjo in a 1941 stage production at the Bucks County Playhouse in Pennsylvania.

A dog bite to the nose kept Bette Davis from being able to film scenes in the movie production of *The Man Who Came to Dinner* for several weeks.

In the film, Jimmy Durante's character Banjo refers to Ann Sheridan's character Lorraine as "The Oomph Girl," which was Sheridan's real-life nickname. In the original play, Banjo calls Lorraine "Old Hot-pants."

At Bette Davis' request, celebrated actor John Barrymore was offered the part of Whiteside for the film version of the story. Barrymore declined, citing deteriorating health and inability to memorize lines.

The role of Maggie is reportedly based on socialite, poet and screenwriter Dorothy Parker, the first female drama critic of Broadway and a founding member of the renowned literary Algonquin Circle, of which George Kaufman was also a member.

In her later years, Dorothy Parker became an activist for civil rights and social justice, leaving a large portion of her estate to the Martin Luther King, Jr., Foundation.

The Man Who Came to Dinner was made into a television production for Hallmark Hall of Fame in 1972 starring Orson Welles as Sheridan Whiteside. Welles was a real-life friend of Alexander Woollcott's.

The play was revived on Broadway in 1980 at the Circle in the Square Theatre, in 2000 at the Roundabout Theatre starring Nathan Lane, and in a short-lived musical comedy called *Sherry* in 1967.

Though married, playwright George Kaufman was a notorious womanizer. His affair with actress Mary Astor gained national notoriety when Astor's diary entries about Kaufman were made public during her divorce and custody battle with husband Franklin Thorpe.

Composer/lyricist Cole Porter wrote "What Am I To Do?" to accompany the Broadway opening in 1939.

—Linda McConchie

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Subscription, box office and all-around ticket guru David Atwood reports that subscriptions this fall are up 17%!

SAD LOSSES

Sadly, we must report the loss, on November 16, of long-time Concord Players subscriber and member George Bramhall, husband of Mary Allen (M.A., as she is known to many of us). If you would like to make a donation in his memory, it may be made to Emerson Hospital, c/o Development Office, ORNAC, Concord, MA 01742.

In addition, On November 12, we lost another longtime subscriber and member, Betty Porter (Elizabeth), wife of Tom Porter. If you would like to make a donation in Betty's name, it may be made to the New England Wildflower Society, 180 Hemenway Road, Framingham, MA 01701.

FOPAC MESSIAH SING DECEMBER 20

Don't miss the Fourth Annual FOPAC Messiah Sing at 51 Walden at 2 p.m. on Sunday, December 20. Georg Freidrich Handel (*aka* Alan Yost) will conduct musicians from the Band and Orchestra. The soloists, costumed by Kathy Booth, include Sarah Telford (pictured here in costume), Jacque Wilson, Craig Hanson and Bryan McNeil. Historic guests will be attending the sing, portrayed by Charlie Streff, Miles Petrie and Tom Ruggles. The audience will be seated in sections to join in the chorus, and scores will be available to borrow. Admission is \$15, \$10 for seniors and students.



CHUCK HOLLEMAN FEATURED IN CONCORD BAND CONCERT

The Concord Band opened its season [October 24] with a program built around British and Irish composers. The highlight of the concert was three movements from *Façade* by English composer William Walton. This piece was originally for seven instruments and speaker. Three movements ["Popular Song," "Jodelling Song" and "Polka."] have been arranged for band and Mr. O'Dell decided to add the narration back into the band arrangement to great effect. Kudos to the reciter, Chuck Holleman, a member of the Concord Players, who gave a lively performance of the mock-serious words. He recited with appropriately extreme expression in time to the music. After the ridiculously funny Polka Song, Mr. Holleman grinned like a kid having a wonderful time as the audience applauded.

—Pamela J. Marshall, Concord Journal



Chuck Holleman (right) rehearses Walton's Façade with James O'Dell conducting.

Composer William Walton referred to *Façade* as "an entertainment" and the music is marked by parody, mock seriousness, and rollicking rhythms. The text was composed by British poet Dame Edith Sitwell, and she was the reciter when *Façade* was first performed in January 1922 at the Sitwell home in Chelsea, England.

Videographers from Concord-Carlisle CCTV documented the concert. You can see the resulting recording on local cable at <http://concordtv.org/>, and you can borrow DVD and CD copies from the Concord Free Public Library beginning about a month after the concert, or you can order a DVD or CD by sending a written request with how many of each, plus a check or cash (\$15 for each DVD and \$10 for each CD) to: The Concord Band, PO Box 302, Concord, MA 01742, and including your name and mailing address.

SHOW SELECTION FOR NEXT SEASON UNDERWAY

Rick Frese, chair of the committee, reports that the Play/Director Selection Committee is hard at work, reviewing potential plays/shows for the 2010–2011 season. The committee began its deliberations with a list of 135 productions, and is busy trimming it down to 3 shows, in time for a March Annual Meeting announcement of The Concord Players new season. Committee members include Lisa Astbury, Kate Blair, Doug Cooper, Faith Pelletier, Cathie Regan, and Diane Statkus.

THE PLAYERS COLLABORATE WITH CCPOPS

This month The Concord Players began collaborating with CCPOPS, the parent support group for performing arts students at Concord-Carlisle High School. The Players and CCPOPS will swap program ads and website links this season in an effort to draw greater attention and attendance to both organizations.

The fall musical of Concord-Carlisle High School will be the Tony Award winning Broadway show *Falsettos*. The author and composer, William Finn, chatted by telephone conference with the cast at their rehearsal on Thanksgiving Day—what a thrill for the high school actors! To learn more about CCPOPS, please visit the website at www.ccpops.org.

Falsettos will be performed on Friday, December 11, at 7:30, Saturday, December 12, at 7:30, and Sunday, December 13, at 2:00.

Coincidentally, the Concord Youth Theatre is putting on Finn's *25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, the first non-professional company to do so. That show runs Dec. 11 to Dec. 20: Fridays at 7:30, Saturdays at 2 and 7, and Sundays at 2:30.

LETTER FROM A CAT FAN

Dear Concord Players,

I want to thank you for staging such an outstanding performance of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. I knew that this was a famous play but I'd forgotten the details. I deliberately did not read up on it or watch one of the film versions—I wanted to experience your production live, first hand, in the theater. I was blown away, both by the power and insights of Tennessee Williams' writing, but also by the strength and passion of the cast. It had tremendous impact. The second act was one of the most riveting pieces of drama I've ever seen in community theater, bar none. Liam McNeil played his part well and has true talent; hang onto him. Tom Large was absolutely incredible in his portrayal of Big Daddy. My father grew up in the South, and Tom's mannerisms and figures of speech were dead-on authentic. This performance was much much more than I expected. I'm no longer planning to watch any of the film versions—I would rather that the Concord Players' performance remain branded in my mind as my "mid-life" experience of this wonderful play. Bravo!

Sincerely, Steve Smith

Visit the website at www.concordplayers.org
for more detailed information.

The newsletter deadline is the third Friday of each
month.

Send us your news to news@concordplayers.org

Archived Newsletters are available at
<http://www.concordplayers.org/Newsletter/archives.html>