



Footlights

MARCH-APRIL 2024

The Players of Utica Newsletter

Laughing Stock: Funny, Loving Look at Amateur Theatre

WE ALL LOVE amateur theatre. It strives to present wonderful performances, but despite the well-meaning intentions of a dedicated cast, a live show sometimes produces unexpected — and hilarious — results. That's the premise of *Laughing Stock*, the next Players of Utica production which opens on April 5 at the Players Theatre. Players' President **Art Felshaw** spoke with director **Stephen Wagner** about the comedy.

ART: What is it about this play that got your attention?

STEPHEN: I like to direct comedies, especially, because they allow for a lot of freedom with characterization, physical improvisation, and almost anything that we can add to the show that makes it fun and funny. And with a farce like *Laughing Stock*, you can let your imagination run wild. What I also like about this play is that although it has many farcical elements, it also has a lot of heart. Yes, it is a crazy comedy about a small, somewhat inept theatre group whose shows are plagued by mishaps, but it also shows the affection that the company members have for one another and for the experience of creating live theatre.

ART: Characters that an audience can relate to always make them laugh. What are some of the relatable characters in the play?

STEPHEN: It's a pretty big cast—14 people—so there is a wide array of characters that the audience can either relate to or instantly recognize: egotistical actors, a first-time director who has no idea what she's doing, aging actors who perhaps should have retired years ago, young actors who need much more experience, short-tempered managers who struggle with managing the group, designers given way too much to design in a short time, and a director who is desperately trying to hold it all together while taking on too much himself. They all combine to create wonderful comedy.

ART: How often does the cast rehearse and for how long each time?

STEPHEN: We rehearse for five or six weeks before opening, and that's typically three days a week. When we get closer to opening, we might add a fourth or fifth day. And generally we rehearse from 6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. We started rehearsing a bit early for this production—allowing seven weeks—because it has some highly technical scenes that have to be worked out and perfected.



ART: As a long time-director, what is the most challenging thing about mounting a production like *Laughing Stock*?

STEPHEN: Working with a large cast always has challenges, from a logistical point of view, because each actor has a job or family commitments and we have to create a rehearsal schedule that works for everyone and for the production. The other greatest challenge are those highly technical scenes I mentioned that have to be rehearsed over and over to work out the timing and all the comic possibilities to get the absolute most out of them. Luckily, I have a very good cast of experienced, enthusiastic actors who are dedicated to putting together a great show.

ART: If someone wants to audition for a play, what advice would you give?

STEPHEN: First, I would advise learning something about the play before even going into the audition. Sometimes scripts can be found online or in a library, or at least detailed synopses can be found online. With that information, they can usually identify a specific character that they wish to audition for. Of course, they

don't *have* to come in with a specific character in mind, they can just see how the audition is conducted and perhaps discover how the director might see them fitting in. Many auditions are cold readings from a script, which can be challenging because you're being asked to create a character and get involved in a situation on the spot. Hopefully, the director will give some information to work with. The

(Continued on page 2)



Open Auditions for *Funny Girl*



BECOME A PART of this classic Broadway musical that guarantees a great time for actors, tech crews, musicians, and audiences!

SATURDAY, March 23 — 12 pm–3 pm

SUNDAY, March 24 — 1:30 pm–4 pm

TUESDAY, March 26 — 6:30 pm–8 pm

(If you have a conflict with audition dates or with questions, call 315-724-7624 and leave your name and number.)

Director: Dan Fusillo Music Director: Karen Corigliano Choreographer: Patrick St. Thomas

Roles for Actors, Singers, Dancers, Showgirls, Chorus (16 years old and up)

- Fanny Brice: comedic style, acting range from impassioned teen to major star
- Emma: Fanny's dresser and confidant
- John: stage manager
- Mrs. Brice: Fanny's tough Brooklyn mother, dry humor
- Mrs. Strakosh: Mrs. Brice's poker-playing crony, shrill yet funny
- Mrs. Meeker: another of Mrs. Brice's cohorts
- Mrs. O'Malley: fourth friend, Irish accent
- Tom Kenney: tough vaudeville producer
- Eddie Ryan: song and dance man, energetic
- Bubbles, Polly, Maude: classic showgirl types
- Nick Arnstein: gambler, suave, love of Fanny's life
- Florenz Ziegfeld: the famous producer, elegant, imposing.
- Mr. Renaldi: talent agent (non-singing role)
- Ziegfeld tenor
- Chorus and dancing roles

No prepared audition song will be needed. Sections of "I'm The Greatest Star," "Henry Street," "If A Girl Isn't Pretty," and "I Want To Be Seen With You" from the score will be used at the audition. **John Krause** will accompany.

PERFORMANCE DATES:

June 6, 7, 8, 9, & 13, 14, 15, 16, 2024

For details: www.playersofutica.org/auditions



Melissa Loiacano

PLAYERS OF UTICA lost one of its most beloved and valued production volunteers with the passing of **Melissa Loiacano** in January 2024.

Melissa, with her ever-friendly demeanor and biting wit, was always willing to lend a hand as part of a production crew and was a much-sought-after lighting designer and technician for numerous Players plays and musicals. She also lent her talents to other

local theatres, including The Ilion Little Theatre.

As a performer, Melissa occasionally worked her stand-up comedy routine at a few of our open mics.

"Besides being a personal friend, Melissa was a friend to Players," says Players' President Art Felshaw. "Her dedication and wit mixed with a bit of a brassy nature, made many of us love her. Her inner light was equal to the ones she used to light the stage. We think about her often. Miss you."

Players extends its deepest sympathy to Melissa's family and friends. ☆

Laughing Stock

(Continued from page 1)

most important thing for someone auditioning, I think, is to not hold back. Don't worry about doing the character "wrong." A director often wants to see how brave and how open an actor can be on stage and how well they can take direction. So my advice: Be fearless and be bold.

Laughing Stock features **Lonnie Etter, Joshua Thompson, Jessie Rogan, Alexis Carey, James McNeil, Eric Almleaf, Paul Boehlert, Michele Buday, Vin Cavo, Janet Hanna, Michael O'Brien, Chuck Bastien, and Kelly Maida.**

Laughing Stock has a running time of about two hours, with a 15-minute intermission. The six performances of the play are as follows:

Fridays, April 5 and 12 at 7:30 p.m.

Saturdays, April 6 and 13 at 2:00 p.m.

Sundays, April 7 and 14 at 2:00 p.m.

For all tickets, go to our website at <http://www.playersofutica.org/order-tickets> or call 315-724-7624. ☆



Online Shows Now Available to All

WHEN THE COVID-19 pandemic shut down our theatre a couple of years ago, Players had to scramble to continue to raise income to help pay our bills. We came up with Players Theatre At Home — an online destination for entertainment using the Patreon platform where patrons could subscribe for \$5.95 a month.

Well, now that the severest form of the pandemic is over and we have resumed live shows at our theatre, we have

closed down the Patreon site and have moved all the content to our website where anyone can access all the shows — for free!

You'll find "The Oil Paint Monologues"; Players Radio Theatre (more than a dozen shows); original video plays, including *Passionate Verses*, *I Bequeath*, *Quarantine Warning from Space*, and *Fearing: Tale of a Dreadful Town*; cabarets; the *Play Date with Art 'n' Bonnie* talk show; and more on the way. Go and enjoy! (<https://www.playersofutica.org/players-theatre-at-home>) ☆

How to Get Your Tickets

MANY OF YOU already know how to get tickets for our shows, but for those who don't, here's the scoop:

- **By phone:** Just call 315-724-7624 and tell us which performance you would like to attend. Have your credit card ready. If there's no answer, leave a message and we will call back as soon as we can.
- **Online:** Go to our ticket page and securely purchase your tickets with your credit card: www.playersofutica.org/order-tickets.
- **At the door.** You can often buy tickets at the box office on the day of the performance. But just don't get there too late because seating is limited and sometimes shows sell out.

If you're a subscriber, you have already bought your tickets, of course, but you should still call or go online to reserve your seat. See you at the show! ☆



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Players of Utica

1108 State St., Utica

315-724-7624

FROM THE PLAYERS HISTORY ARCHIVES



I LOVE MY WIFE - OCTOBER 2000

Directed by **Daniel Fusillo**, music director, **Stephen A. Paparo**. Featuring **Cara Lee Haman**, **Linda LaPorte-Stoodley**, **Jack A. Catano, Jr.**, **Greg Halpen**, **Matt Klausner**, **Doug Churcher**, **Stephen A. Paparo**, **David Cook**.

THANK YOU, SUPPORTERS

A special thanks to these subscribers who gave extra support to Players

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