

# No February curse, only laughs in Stage Right comedy

Theatre companies have traditions, and in some cases, superstitions. It just goes with the territory.

Stage Right, resident troupe of downtown Conroe's Crighton Theatre, jokes about its "February Curse."

The idea has been around since the beginning of Stage Right, and shows no indication of spinning into a quiet niche. Stage Right folks would say there's a reason for that.

This year the "February Curse" involved one of Stage Right's key actresses, Yvonne Nelson. "Barefoot in the Park" director Jillian Nolan chose her to portray Ethel Banks, the mother-in-law of main character Paul Bratter. The Neil Simon comedy opened last weekend at the Crighton Theatre.

"Yvonne had a respiratory



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infection that settled in her vocal chords," said Carolyn Corsano Wong, staunch SR supporter. "She had not been able to speak for over two weeks."

Yvonne tried steroids, antibiotics, and well-meant advice, but nothing could overcome her malady.

"The cast had been rehearsing for two weeks with Yvonne pantomiming the action on stage while someone else read her lines," Carolyn said.

"When I came the Sunday before opening to set up for sound, I couldn't believe what I was not hearing!"

On Monday, Yvonne's physician advised her to allow her understudy "to perform the part opening weekend."

Problem: No understudy. (They are not customary in most community theatre productions.)

Well, play director, Jillian Nolan? Well, Yvonne and Carolyn? Now what?

At Jillian Nolan's bequest, Corsano Wong went to rehearsal Tuesday and wrote down the blocking that Jillian had laid out for Yvonne's character.

Two days prior to Friday's opening Carolyn began to learn Yvonne's dialog, and was off book with nary a hitch for the next night's pre-

view.

"Friday night we opened for real," Carolyn said. "We had over 300 at the show Saturday night. And Sunday — well, Sunday, I went to the nuthouse."

Every show that Stage Right has produced in Februarys past has encountered problems.

The first time was when a production company reneged on its "Willy Wonka" agreement. That required a last minute switch to romantic play "Love Letters."

The following February, SR encountered problems with a publisher and was forced to switch from musical "Cole!" about Cole Porter to comedy "Lend Me a Tenor."

"Always ... Patsy Cline" last February found star Mary Allen-Keating needing

to miss a performance because of her best friend's wedding. Not easy to convince another professional singer to step into a role for only one night, but possible.

Meanwhile, coming up to date, Neil Simon's "Barefoot in the Park" scored huge with weekend crowds. Simon, the master of one-liners, was never better than with this comedy. No matter how often you've seen it, when the delivery is timed just right, it's always fresh laughter. Such is the case with this SR submission.

The characters are wonderfully drawn, with an enveloping chemistry that spills across the whole stage, overcoming even Corsano Wong's late entry.

In his first ever on stage role, leading man Richard Wilcox turned in a remark-

able performance.

In Act Two's drunken scene he executes so many prat falls, you expect broken bones, or at least gushing blood. His swift transition from serious young lawyer to inebriated vagabond is convincingly comical.

With flawless timing, Crys McClure as Corie the frivolous young bride allows no snicker to get away.

If you were never sure just what a "hissie" fit looks like, you can get a graphic illustration from McClure in Act Two.

Telephone repairman, and deliveryman, Steven Dowell and Gerald Livingston, play their roles to the hilt, managing to elicit major guffaws in minor roles. To her enormous credit Corsano Wong,

the perennial comedian, could have been rehearsing from the start.

Patrick Slagle brings new meaning to the term raffish in his portrayal of nefarious neighbor, Mr. Velasco.

I do offer one caveat, however. In this age of problems with alcohol consumption, there's an awful lot of drinking on stage. Just the way Simon wrote it for laughs. Still....

This Neil Simon comedy opened on Broadway in October 1963, and it still rolls audiences in collective aisles. That's the way with classics.

"Barefoot in the Park" runs weekends through March 4 at 8 p. m., with matinees this Sunday and March 4 at 2 p. m. Tickets cost \$20 or less at the Crighton Theatre, 936-441-7469 or [www.stage-right.org](http://www.stage-right.org).

As it does for most local nonprofits, the Conroe Commission on the Arts and Culture provides some funding for Stage Right.

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