

**STAGE RIGHT DEBUTS WITH "CHRISTMAS
BELLES"**

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For readers who may be familiar with the nutty zaniness of the famed stage comedies of the "Tuna" series that began with "Greater Tuna," and even those readers who may have more recently enjoyed the lunacy of the local premiere of Montgomery County's original comedy, "Armchair, Texas," the fun is now continuing at Conroe's **Crighton Theatre** in the form of "**CHRISTMAS BELLES.**" This comic romp, the second offering in a trilogy written by Jessie Jones, Nicholas Hope, and Jamie Wooten, is directed in this Stage Right Production by Adam Sweeney. **STAGE RIGHT**, by the way, is the area's most recent addition to the theatrical community, and some cast members will be familiar to fans of the Crighton Players, now housed in the new Owen Theatre across the street from the Crighton. With its new website, (www.StageRightOfTexas.org), the fledgling company has the stated goal of providing "...high quality entertainment to the citizens of Montgomery County." If "Christmas Belles" is any indication, they are off to a rip-roaring and hilarious start.

The contemporary action is set "in and around the Tabernacle of the Lamb Church in Fayro, Texas." We first meet feisty Miss Geneva Musgrave (Carolyn Corsano Wong), who runs BooKoo BoKay Florist. After more than 30 years of directing the church Nativity program, she has been suddenly replaced by Honey Raye Futrelle (Amy Sowers), who is staging a "Bethlehem Lollapalooza" that may include a 4th wise man presenting baby Jesus with a gift of butternut squash lasagna. Sound unconventional? Needless to say, Geneva is not happy about this turn of events and Wong's fist pumping characterization makes that quite clear. Geneva's opening telephone monologue lays out her complaints, and once again Wong's knack for comic voices and facial expressions reminds me of comedienne, Lily Tomlin. (As she stomps on and off stage, you may also find yourself thinking of Granny Clampert from "The Beverly Hillbillies.")

Several opening scenes are cleverly staged in front of the

curtain that hides the attractive church scene of set (and lighting) designer, Jim Bingham. Onto that set parade a series of hilarious characters. We have the swaggering and heavy-set sheriff, John Curtis Buntner (Michael Raabe), who has in custody Honey Raye's young sister, Twink Futrelle (Melody Gray). Twink, it seems, had a serious grudge against one Wylie Hicks, and set fire to Wylie's valuable NASCAR memorabilia collection, resulting in flying embers that burned down the local trailer park. Any redneck jokes come to mind?

Next we meet the Futrelle sister's mom, Frankie Futrelle Dubberly (Maria O. Sergio), and her husband, Dub Dubberly (Katt Gilcrease). The very pregnant Frankie is tired of being "super sized." Dub plays Santa at a local market, and when he asks Frankie what she would like for Christmas she replies, "I want Santa to get a vasectomy!" Don't miss Dub's riotous back spasms after too many tots sit on Santa's lap. You have to see it to believe it!

Megan Goode plays Gina Jo, Dub and Frankie's whiny and flighty daughter, who is being timidly pursued by the church pastor, Justin Waverly (Chad Thackston). Add to the mix the fun-filled character of Rhonda Lynn (Melody Montez), aptly described by a fellow character as "a walkin', talkin' happy pill." We learn that Rhonda's former lover had such a hairy back that she had to vacuum the sheets each morning before making the bed. With skin-tight gold lamé pants and tasseled cowboy boots, Rhonda's outlandish costume is one of many amusing offerings from designer, Molly Goode. And speaking of amusing, we cannot forget the Fayro town idiot, Reynerd Chisum. Played with understated hilarity by Thomas Lockhart Jr., Reynerd may be the only one in town who really understands what Christmas is all about, as all these characters interact during preparations for the all-important Nativity pageant. Even the town's egotistical snob, Patsy Price (Cindy M. Tippens) gets into the act. (Well, almost!) It's a merry mix for a Merry Christmas. If you don't take life too seriously, head over to the Crighton to exercise your laugh muscles and get in the spirit of a season that celebrates the second chances made possible by the birth of the Christ Child.

CHRISTMAS BELLES at the Crighton Theatre will be performed at 2pm today, with evening performances at 8pm next Friday and Saturday. For tickets and information call: 936-441-7469 (Ext. 201) or visit

www.StageRightOfTexas.org

Bentley's columns, featured in newspapers from the East Coast to the Gulf Coast, may be viewed on the website at www.ThePeoplesCritic.com while E-mail may be addressed to ThePeoplesCritic@earthlink.net