

'Christmas Belles' promises yule laughs, chuckles and guffaws

BY BRAD MEYER
Courier staff

When the residents of the mythical Texas town of Fayro prepare for their annual Christmas pageant, it's a sure bet confusion reigns and comedy ensues on the stage of the Crighton Theatre.

Stage Right co-founder Steve Wong makes his directorial debut with "Christmas Belles," a hilarious holiday comedy opening tonight at 8 p.m. and running through Dec. 19. Originally presented in 2008 to rave reviews, Wong says the new version is even better.

"We have several members from the original cast and that gave us a head start," he said. "We've been able to work on fleshing out the characters, timing and make the play even funnier for the audience."

The production features the antics of the Futrelle sisters – Frankie, Twink and Honey Raye – trying to keep their lives and the town's Christmas pageant from spiraling out of control surrounded by the community's colorful, but whacky residents.

"There are a lot outrageous characters," said Wong. "They're even funnier because they will remind you of people you know in real life."

Wong describes "Christmas Belles" as "The Golden Girls" meets "A Charlie Brown Christmas."

"There's a simplicity and a basic level of humanity that's easy to recognize," he said. "But then there is a lot of humor as mistakes and misunderstandings spin things out

WHAT'S NEXT

Stage Right's production of the holiday comedy "Christmas Belles" premieres tonight at 8 p.m. at the Crighton Theatre, located at 234 N. Main St. in Conroe, and runs weekends through Dec. 19. For tickets and information, call (936) 441-SHOW.

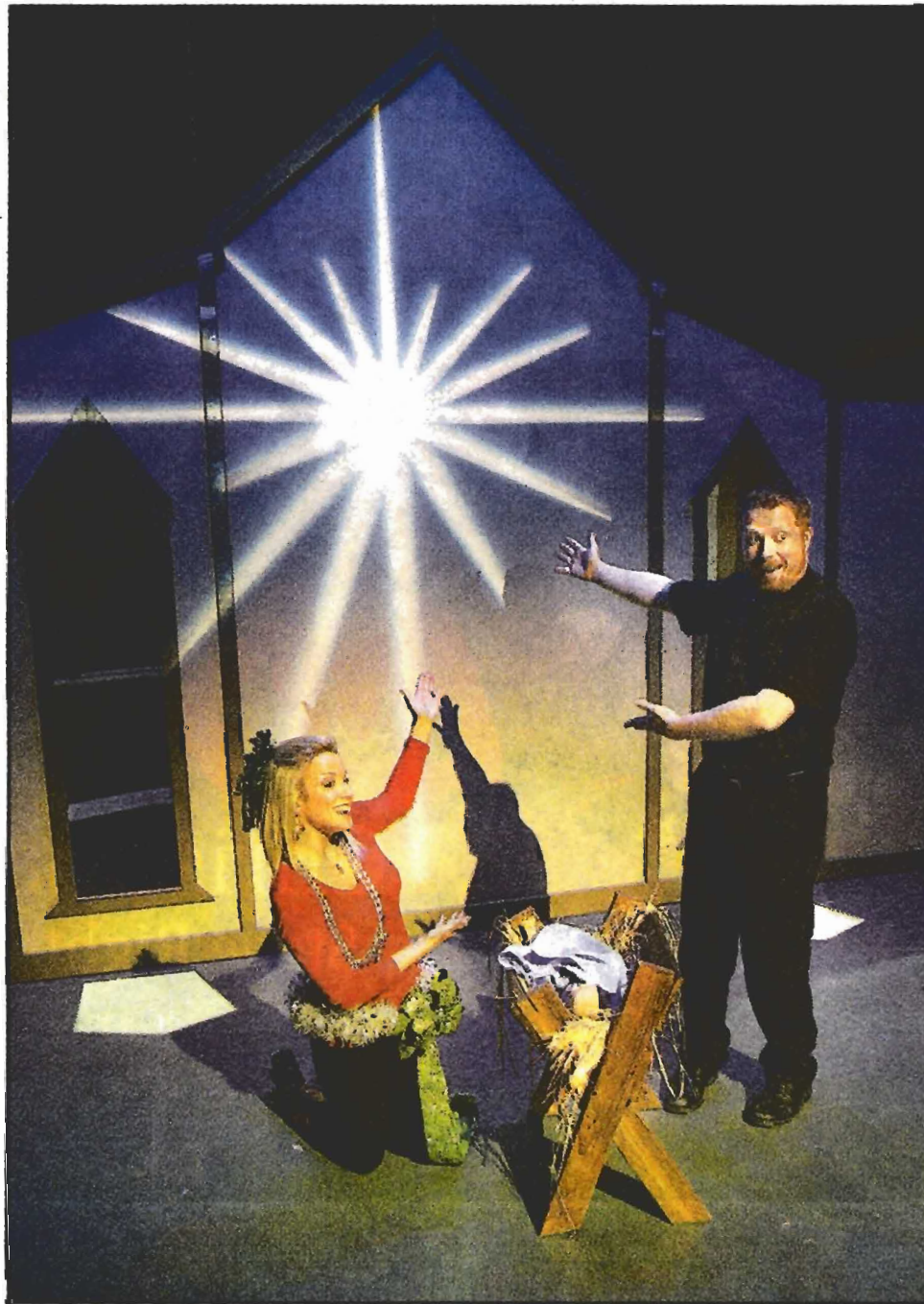


Photo by Brad Meyer

Dalin Kennard and Patrick Slagle in Stage Right's production of "Christmas Belles."

of control." Having many of the original cast members allowed Wong to focus on enhancing the performance. What worked in the original 2008 production was kept, but other parts were changed.

He also had actors work on constructing a "back story" for their characters to help them develop more convinc-

ing performances.

"It's not method acting," he said. "But it does help the actors give a more natural approach to creating their characters – and this play has some interesting characters."

Among the cast members reprising his role is Katt Gilcrease as Dub Dubberly – a redneck father of twins dealing with a kidney stone

while he works as Santa at the local Super Smart Mart. Retired after 21 years with the Texas Department of Corrections, Gilcrease is acting full time.

"This play is particularly enjoyable because it's funny to watch, but it's fun to do as well," he said. "It's as much fun for the actors as it is for the audience."



Photo by Brad Meyer

Melody Montez, Michael Raabe and Dalin Kennard in Stage Right's production of "Christmas Belles." The show opens tonight at 8 p.m.



Photo by Brad Meyer

Carolyn and Harley Wong are pictured. Carolyn Wong is the co-founder of Stage Right Productions and both she and rescue pet Harley have roles in "Christmas Belles."

Gilcrease has appeared in several of Stage Right's productions and is branching out into movie and television roles. He also teaches at Bravo Company, Stage Right's theatrical program for youths beginning at age five.

Wong, a petroleum engineer, became interested in theater as a child. He acted in school productions at age 12 and enjoyed musical theater in high school. When dating his future wife – popular local actress and Stage Right co-founder Carolyn Wong – the couple was active in acting and theater activities.

"After we were married, she spent so much time at the theater I figured if I wanted to see her, I better get involved too," he quipped. "And once you get involved, it becomes addictive."

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