

Conroe Symphony concert honors 'Christmas – that special time'

Almost all will agree it's "Christmas – that special time of the year." None would concur more heartily than the Conroe Symphony Orchestra, who adopted this theme for its annual concert Dec. 5.



PEGGIE MILLER
Performing Arts Columnist

"The program emphasizes the glorious sounds of Christmas, and Christmas at the movies," said Executive Director Dr. Aline Arnold, who also lauded John Wiesner Auto for underwriting this holiday concert.

"Mr. Wiesner is on the CSO board of directors, and the symphony holds special significance for him," Dr. Arnold explained.

A commendable CSO tradition is to open each concert with the national anthem. Following that on Dec. 5, audience members will hear selections from Tchaikovsky's beloved Christmas ballet, "The Nutcracker," conducted by CSO Maestro Dr. Don Hutson.

An exceptional segment of the Monday evening concert is a performance by flutist Stephanie Harris, a Conroe native and 1989 graduate of Conroe High School. A charter CSO member, she went on to earn a music and computer

science degree from Sam Houston State University, and currently is a communications supervisor with Walker County Public Safety Department. In addition to being a CSO flutist, Ms. Harris teaches private flute lessons and performs extensively. The CSO will collaborate with her in a distinctive version of "O Holy Night."

Following is Custer's "A Canadian Brass Concert," and Gustafson's "Glorious Sounds of Christmas."

Music from the movies includes "Miracle on 34th Street," and songs from "Polar Express" that children will recognize. These include "Somewhere in my Memory," "Making Christmas," and "Where Are You, Christmas?"

Following a nod to "Around the World at Christmas," the program concludes with a sing along.

Tickets for the "Glorious Sounds of Christmas" may be obtained at the CSO Symphony Centre, 1500 North Frazier, from 10 a.m. until 3 p.m., Mondays through Thursdays or at the door preceding the concert. Cost is \$15 for adults; \$5 for children under age 12. Group discounts are available for 10 or more.

Season tickets for the remaining four concerts are prorated to \$50. These include two complimentary tickets to be given at the purchaser's choice. Call 936-760-2144.

Stage Right announced auditions for romantic Broadway comedy "Barefoot in the Park," also memorable as a 1967 movie that starred Jane Fonda and Robert Redford.

It's about newlyweds, Corie and Paul Bratter, in Manhattan. He's an earnest young lawyer, who lives with his nonconformist bride in a tiny apartment at the top of a building with no elevator. The digs are more than modest, with a closet bedroom, leaky skylight and unreliable plumbing. An individualistic middle-aged artist who is their neighbor becomes involved when the mother-in-law visits. Nothing seems to go as hoped,

leaving the young attorney without a law book to stand on.

The cast includes the newly wed couple; her mother; Mr. Velasco the aging raffish artist; and two repairmen.

Auditions are Sunday and Monday, Dec. 4 & 5 at 7 p.m. in downtown Conroe's Crighton Theatre rehearsal hall at 117 Simonton. Auditioners will be asked to read from the script for director Jillian Nolan.

"Barefoot in the Park" runs weekends Feb. 17 through March 4 at 8 p.m., with afternoon matinees Feb. 26 and March 4. Visit www.stage-right.org for more.

Much-loved family show "A Christmas Story" is up next for Stage Right. It opens Dec. 2 at the Crighton, with grown-up

Ralph reminiscing about the childhood Christmas when he, as young Ralphie, longed for a genuine Red Ryder BB gun. Joe Witcraft portrays the adult, counterbalanced by his young self, Peter McPoland, age 12, of The Woodlands. Peter has garnered much experience in Class Act productions "Seussical," "Les Miserables," "Annie, Jr.," "Singing in the Rain," and more.

The long-suffering mother is Patrice Kentimenos seen previously in numerous productions for Stage Right and venues elsewhere.

Witcraft, also of The Woodlands, is recognized for abundant local roles.

Of special note is Randy Coulter Barzilla, 7, who studies with the SR Bravo Company for youth, and

possesses previous stage experience. His grandmother, Lyn Hawthorne Howard, is a devoted volunteer with the Montgomery County Performing Arts Society, and longtime board member.

Audience favorites Carolyn Corsano Wong and Katt Gilcrease appear in featured roles, respectively, as Miss Shields, Ralphie's teacher, and an old man. Carolyn's son, Michael Wong, portrays school bully Scut Farkas.

About a dozen others create memorable roles. They all can be seen weekends Dec. 2-18 at 8 p.m., with two Sunday matinees. Call the Crighton box office at 936-441-7469.

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wonder alive."

But Bingham was quick to praise the cast, crew and assistant director Amy Sowers for their hard work and dedication. He offered special appreciation to the sound technicians who have to keep up with so many actors in the fast-paced comedy.

"It's a great show for the whole family," he said. "Christmas is a time for telling family stories from the 'old' days – this play is a good starting point for fam-

ilies to share their own stories and keep traditions alive."

One of the most popular props associated with "A Christmas Story" is a table lamp in the form of a statuette leg with fishnet stockings. Stage Right will conduct a silent auction throughout the run of the play offering the lamp to the highest bidder at the end of the play's run.

"It's a pretty popular item," said Bingham. "Everybody asks about it; everybody wants it – so we're going to make that possible."

The Stage Right production of "A Christmas Story" runs Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m. from Dec. 2-18, with Sunday matinees at 2 p.m. on Dec. 11 and 18, at the Crighton Theatre. Tickets are available online at www.stage-right.org or by calling the Crighton Theatre box office at 936-441-SHOW (7469). Tickets are \$17 for adults, \$15 for seniors and groups of 10-20 persons, and \$12 for youth and groups over 20 persons.

Visit www.stage-right.org for more about Stage Right Productions.

STAGE RIGHT
Jean Shepherd's
A Christmas Story
Dec. 2 - 18, 2011
at the historic
Crighton Theatre
Tickets: 936-441-SHOW
or **www.stage-right.org**