

'Harvey' hops into Crighton April 22 with Stage Right

Having comedy "Harvey" open on Easter weekend at the Crighton Theatre is pure coincidence.

That's according to STAGE RIGHT, resident troupe at the Crighton. It's just a happy happenstance; but one that can play on this season with Easter eggs and rabbits that are dear to sweets-seeking children too young to comprehend the significance of Christ's life, death and resurrection.

Most adults fondly recall "Harvey," the movie that endeared James Stewart to millions. He portrayed the lovable tippler, Elwood P. Dowd, who fancied himself accompanied by, and conversing with, a white rabbit taller than six feet that only he could see.

"But," said SR director, SAM MARTINEZ, "Elwood is not really a lush. He's a person who orders one drink, then spends his evening talking with other bar patrons."

Director Martinez conceived a unique but demanding vision of how he wanted to present his play. Taking the black and white movie as inspiration, Martinez opted to use only those hues along with grays and a bit of tan for his set, costumes, and props.

He credits set designer DEBRA SCHULTZ, of Houston Community College — Northeast, and KATHLEEN ZARITSKI, who built costumes of the period, for crafting his idea.

The action is set in the late 1930s — early 40s, somewhere in the North Eastern U. S. Martinez did not want to pinpoint the city, nor did he wish to recreate Elwood P. Dowd as Jimmy Stewart played him.

"You have to grab people with something unique and draw them into a new production," Sam said. "Separate the two."

Much of the comedy cen-



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Performing Arts Columnist

ters on Elwood's sister, Veta Louise, who MARIA SIRGO portrays. Her daughter, Myrtle Mae (MAREDDITH ZARITSKI) tracks a suitable husband, and both mother and daughter maintain social aspirations that the delusional, nipping Elwood (GERALD LIVINGSTON) jeopardizes.

Exasperated, the reasonable members of the family decide that Elwood must be put away in a sanatorium. This situation makes for large amusing scenes that involve MIKE ANDERSON, as a physician; STEVE MURPHREE, RENEE CANNON, MEGAN NIX and TRAVIS BRYANT. Several of these actors maintain bonds with the CRIGHTON PLAYERS at the Owen Theatre.

"Travis Bryant's part as a hospital orderly is not large," Sam said. "But he delivers his lines with a gravity that makes them funny. He also takes direction well." Travis is a respected CP actor and director at the Owen.

Other cast members are CINDY TIPPENS, and newcomer STEVEN DOWELL playing a cab driver with great insight into the meaning of life.

Stage Right regulars possess credentials of their own, from Maredith Zaritski (daughter of Kathleen), who just finished singing Patsy Cline at Playhouse 1960, and was in "Annie" at the Crighton last summer; to Mike Anderson in "Lend Me a Tenor"; to Sirgo and Tippens of SR's "Christmas

Belles" (twice).

Although Sam Martinez is new to the local theatre scene, he amassed substantial credits elsewhere. A native Houstonian, he tried New York after graduating from North Shore High School in the Houston area.

His father worked at a university and frequently found abandoned college textbooks — Shakespeare, acting techniques, and the like — that he gave to Sam.

With parental encouragement, Sam was accepted at a New York drama school, and experienced some Big Apple success, but returned to Texas in 1998. Acting and directing keep him busy, but he supports himself through a pollution-control job with the state. Last week Sam won a role in "Asylum" at Houston's Theatre Southwest.

Playwright Mary Chase's "Harvey," suitable for all ages, runs weekends April 22 through May 8 at Conroe's Crighton Theatre, with 2 p.m. matinees on May 1 and Mother's Day, May 8. Reserve at 936-441-7469, or www.crightontheatre.org.

STAGE
RIGHT

Presents
HARVEY
by Mary Chase

April 22 - May 8, 2011

at the historic Crighton Theatre
in downtown Conroe
Tickets: 936-441-7469 or
online at www.stage-right.org

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