

Versatile actors, comical scenes shine in 'Mama Won't Fly'



Staff photo by Brad Meyer

"Mama Won't Fly"

Stage Right of Texas offers the world premiere run of "Mama Won't Fly" at the historic Crighton Theatre in Conroe. The show continues this weekend and through Sept. 25.

the area, and read a proclamation naming Friday, Sept. 9, (premiere day) as their day in Conroe.

Ms. Jones received an arm bouquet of yellow roses. Afterward, Nicholas Hope showed off a bolo tie with a silver and gold Texas emblem, the city's gifts to the two male playwrights.

The three expressed appreciation for the welcome, saying they had never been honored thus in all their days of premieres and openings.

The writers must have been equally delighted when they witnessed the first stage performance ever of "Mama Won't Fly." The casting was superb, and several actors created more than one character.

This was perhaps the best I have seen where so many actors produced so many distinct characters in one change after another. They spun into scenes wearing different costumes, wigs, even varying their demeanor, and that, my friends, is versatility.

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By Peggie Miller / performing arts columnist |
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Probably the most notable arts event in Montgomery County last weekend was world premiere of comedy "Mama Won't Fly," produced by Stage Right of Texas in Conroe's Crighton Theatre.

Internationally successful playwrights Jessie Jones, Nicholas Hope and Jamie Wooten penned the script that might be described as "America's Funniest Home Videos" meets "Greater Tuna" or something like that.

The writers proved just as congenial as play director Carolyn Corsano Wong, a SR founder, predicted. During a reception Sept. 8 at Villa Graves, the Walden-area home of Angela and Jim Graves, the playwrights cordially greeted guests (200 or more season ticket subscribers).

They were met in kind, as Conroe Mayor Webb Melder, speaking in the Villa Graves ballroom, welcomed them to

Amy Sowers generated at least three different individuals, and totally lost herself in every one. You absolutely must see Amy in the Vegas wedding chapel scene, especially if you recall the vintage Perez Prado hit, "Cherry Pink and Apple Blossom White."

Marcia Feldt Bates went from being the "curator" in a brassiere museum, to depicting an ancient woman in a wheelchair with an odd way of conveying fondness, finally to playing the irate wife of an aging Romeo.

No matter how well you know these actors personally, you may be astonished when you identify them on stage (and you may not recognize them at all).

Others with equally successful impersonations are Katie Kelly; Katt Gilcrease, providing an uproarious surprise not to be missed near the finale; Michael Raabe, who goes from being a loyal, if creepy widower, to portraying an exasperated cop. Then there's Crys McClure making a change about from real estate to the state of a lonely cowgirl; and Gerald Livingston who as hayseed Uncle Ferd pops up in unexpected places.

Patrick Slagle keeps the scenes on track, and locale, as a sign-changing stage hand of comedic proportions.

The show itself is a series of comical scenes, woven together as three women (Mama, her daughter Savannah, and Hayley, the fiancée of Mama's son) blast from Birmingham, Ala., to a California wedding, complicated by Mama's refusal to fly, and a four-day time crunch, cleverly designed to alter locations while advancing comical situations.

Without question, the evening is a tribute to flexibility. But the three leading characters are faultlessly played as well. Theirs is a level of skill particularly noticeable in this comedy.

Martha Davis plays "Mama," solidifying her position as a superb trouper of many talents; Catherine Anderson as the hyper bride-elect holds onto her comedic crown; and Melody Montez, the guilt ridden daughter, loses no traction as a funny lady.

The set is skillfully, but sparsely done, showing a stylized auto, backyard family picnic, motel room, big rig truck, wedding chapel, and you-name-it. Of course, the limitations of the Crighton stage further complicate each scene change.

Some unexpected costumes add another layer of fun (how ever did Little Orphan Annie land in there?), with near perfect sound and lighting, especially the glowing backdrops.

"Mama Won't Fly" plays weekends through Sept. 25 at Conroe's Crighton Theatre, 234 North Main. Tickets cost \$17 or less, with reservations at 936-441-7469. It's rated PG because young children won't comprehend all the humor, none of which is off color.

The Library Friends of Conroe benefit from cash or used book donations brought to the theatre during "Mama Won't Fly," a project suggested by the playwrights.

Volunteer Vicki Christopher, Library Friends of Conroe president since 1994, helps 8 to 10 hours a week at the central library, cataloguing book donations and running the little book nook store, where the friends raised \$27,000 last year through sales and donations to further community literacy, and attendant projects.

You may not know this about the modest Vicki, who works in her husband's dental office Mondays through Wednesdays. At age 9, she wrote a letter to the mayor of Huntsville, requesting that a library be built in her area. A newspaper printed her letter and it became a citizens' rallying point that eventually did bring a library there.

"I feel that I am fulfilling my destiny by volunteering for the library," said the former child activist, whose letter spearheaded her hometown effort.

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