

Stage Right Brings The Music Man to the Historic Crighton Theatre

By Carolyn Corsano Wong

July 15-31, Stage Right of Texas, the resident non-profit theatre company at the historic Crighton Theatre in downtown Conroe, invites you to step into the town of River City Iowa of 1912. We offer you a chance to return to a simpler time: a time when the morals of those in town were in question when a pool table arrives, rather than when lewd photos of an elected official arrive on someone's cell phone. Return to a time when kids snuck out of the house to learn the latest dance step instead of finding the latest prescription medication to try. Wouldn't it be nice to live a town like River City of 1912? You can, if even for a few hours, with the production of Meredith Willson's *The Music Man*. Drawn from Willson's recollections of his Iowa boyhood, *The Music Man* tells the story of "Professor" Harold Hill, who cannot read a note of music but specializes in organizing boys' bands and selling band instruments, then disappearing with the money. But when Harold comes to the Iowa town of River City, he comes up against the town librarian, Marian Paroo, who plans to unmask him until she realizes that he is bringing new life to the town and that she is falling in love with him. But Harold is found out by the townspeople anyway and is about to be tarred and feathered until the boys' band gives a horribly cacophonous concert, which the children's dotting parents think masterful. With classic songs like "Goodnight, My Someone"; "Till There Was You," "Seventy-Six Trombones," "Trouble" and the sounds of barbershop harmony, your toes will be tapping from start to finish!

In preparing for this production, as in all productions, a small town was created by our cast and crew. What is a town but a collection of families, and our River City is made up of families old and new to Stage Right. Some new families that have joined us on

Harold and Marian on the porch.



this production include Katlyn Kelly and her husband, Peter. The Kellys are season subscribers and heard about the auditions while attending the Spring production of *Harvey*. When the director of that show announced auditions for *The Music Man* were coming up, Katlyn turned to Peter and said "I'd love to do that!" Peter's reply was "Well, why not?" So, Katlyn auditioned and was cast as Alma Hix. She even got Peter to join her on stage as a salesman and dance with her in the rousing Shipooopi number. We hope Katlyn and Peter's 'well, why not?' attitude will inspire other season subscribers to get more involved.

Another family new to Stage Right is the Kirks. Accomplished percussionist Zach Kirk is not really new to Stage Right; he played drummer Bob-Bob in our production of *Always...Patsy Cline*, both at the Crighton and when we took it on the road to Playhouse 1960. Zach had so much fun doing that show that he told us to include him in the orchestra for *The Music Man*. In this production however, Zach got more of his family in the act. His wife Jennifer is playing trumpet in the orchestra pit, and dancing above Mom and Dad's heads on the stage is daughter Jenna Kirk. This is Jenna's first performance on the Crighton stage. She's having a ball playing a girl in some scenes and a boy in Prof. Hill's band in others; her first time on stage and already she's tackled the ultimate acting challenge of playing the opposite gender!

Another family that is both on the stage and also in the orchestra pit is the Miers family. Mom Kathy Miers plays Ethel Toffelmier. Kathy's five year old daughter Haley is among the youngest members of our River City cast and is enjoying being with Mom on the Crighton stage for the very first time. Kathy and her daughter, Tori Allen were in our production of *Annie* last summer. This summer, Tori is again sharing the stage with her mom in the role of the mayor's youngest daughter, Gracie Shinn. Kathy's son, Tyler Allen is in the orchestra pit playing trumpet. We have some very musical families in *The Music Man*.

Some families in our River City have performed with us before. Audiences may recognize Michael Raabe, playing Prof. Hill's friend Marcellus Washburn, as the wiggled out psychiatrist in our production of *No Time For Sergeants* or sheriff John-Curtis Buntner (yes, the one in the Elvis costume) in *Christmas Belles*. Joining Michael in those productions and again in *The Music Man* are his two sons, Mike and David. Both young men have been a blessing to us at Stage Right. They have helped backstage on every show they have participated in and by doing

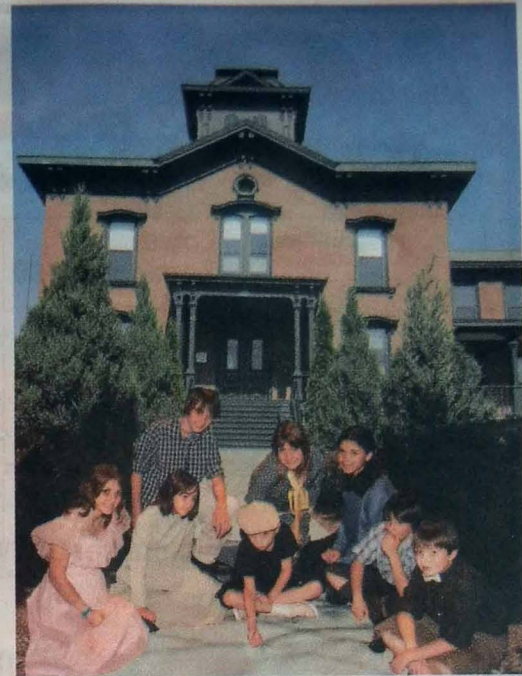
anything that is asked, including moving scenery, working the curtain rigging and even dog handling!

The Montez family may also be familiar to Stage Right audiences. Mom Melody gets to play, of all things, the mother to her son Ian. Melody was last seen as the 'lost' Futrelle sister Rhonda Lynn in our production of *Christmas Belles*. She and Ian performed together in *Cheaper By the Dozen*, yet that time Melody was the family housekeeper. In *The Music Man* she portrays Mrs. Paroo, mom to the lispng Winthrop. Ian shares the role of Winthrop with newcomer Noah Smith. Also appearing is young Robben Montez, Ian's brother. No stranger to the stage, Robben appeared with his mom and older brother in Bravo Company's *The Ever After* and *Doo Wop Wed Widing Hood*.

In addition to the two Winthrops, our River City boasts two town librarians. Both ladies that are sharing the role of Marian Paroo bring back to the Crighton families a wealth of theatre experience. Jenny Hoofnagle, who will be portraying Marian on the first weekend of our run, has brought her parents Tom and Linda to help keep things running smoothly backstage. Linda and Tom had worked with director Manny Cafeo for many years both here at the Crighton and at Playhouse 1960.

Our other librarian - Giny Mendez - will be performing the last two weekends of the run. Audiences may remember Giny from our production of *Lend Me A Tenor*. Her leading man then, and in this show, is Mike Anderson (Prof. Harold Hill). *The Music Man* marks the very welcome return to the Crighton for Giny's parents Gil and Linda Mendez (yes, Giny and Jenny both have a mother named Linda - talk about confusing). Props and set decoration are Linda Mendez's forte and Gil can make just about anything that we may need for a show and on a tight budget. We are so grateful to have them working at the Crighton once again.

Our River Cityzians (as the Mayor is known to say) would like to encourage you to help our hometown. One of our favorite lines in the show occurs when the stubborn Iowans are describing themselves to the newly arrived Harold Hill. Some of the lines



Some River City kids.

are quite humorous due to their 'chip on the shoulder attitude' but one rings true in 1912 and today: "But we'll give you our shirt and a back to go with it if your crops should happen to die." Here in 2011 we've seen, and been inspired by, the toughness of Iowans and those folks in Joplin, MO as they have had to deal with devastating natural disasters. People helping their neighbors through tough times are one of the things that make our communities and our country strong. The drought we are currently in and the high cost of fuel has caused food prices to climb beyond the reach of many in our community. We ask you, our audience, to help those in your own town. Please remember to bring a non-perishable food item to the theatre when you come to see *The Music Man*. The food bank is especially looking for items that can be put in school lunches in preparation for the upcoming school year.

We hope you'll come meet the families of our River City. Who knows? Maybe you'll be inspired to join us on the stage or behind the scenes as many families in the community have done to bring you this wonderful slice of Americana known as *The Music Man*.

The Music Man will run July 15 - 31. Friday and Saturday performances are at 8:00 p.m. and Sunday matinees, July 24 and 31 will be at 2:00 p.m. For tickets, call the Crighton Theatre box office at 936-441-SHOW or visit Stage Right online at www.stage-right.org.