

RATON ~ NEW MEXICO NEWS



The cast of *Why Do We Laugh* presented Saturday night in the Historic Shuler Theater. The play is about a couple as they grow from kids, to teenagers and to middle age, who look back on life and the changes in their life. L to r Stevie Hayden (Meredith 45) Christopher Fissel (Andrew 44) Jeff Redlicke (Andrew 5) Dale Proctor (Meredith 6) Liz Strnad (Meredith 16) Patchamannie Bernal (Andrew 15) in Back is Robert Garcia (Andrew 66) and with her back towards the crowd is Amanda Mehn (Meredith 67)



Andrew (Robert Garcia) and Meredith (Amanda Mehn) look back over life, as they grow from kids through life as teenagers and middle age.



Andrew (Robert Garcia) recalls a memory as played out as teenagers by Liz Strnad (Meredith) and Patchamannie Bernal (Andrew) in the inaugural play of the newly reformed Raton High Drama club.

Raton Youth Production 'Why Do We Laugh' answers its own question

By **TIM KELLER**
Special to the Chronicle

It's been four years since a Raton High School Drama Club mounted a play or entered the esteemed annual Eastern New Mexico University Drama Festival in Portales. With last weekend's delightful "Why Do We Laugh" at the Shuler Theatre, co-produced with the Raton Youth Theater, Raton's teens have made a triumphant return to the theatre scene.

Stephen Gregg's one-act comedy portrays a couple at four stages of life. In a clever staging, instead of showing the four ages in sequence with two actors on stage at a time, four pairs of actors are on stage simultaneously almost throughout the play.

In a sandbox at the front of the stage are five-year-old Andrew and six-year-old Meredith. On chairs off to the right, Andy and Meredith are 15 and 16, talking to each other on telephones. To the left, 44-year-old Andy is reading the newspaper while Meredith reads a book. On a couch atop a riser at the back of the stage are Andy and Meredith at 66 and 67.

Thanks to Bill Donati's capable lighting design, the staging works flawlessly. As spirited

small children, Jeff Redlick and Dale Proctor threaten to steal all attention to the sandbox front and center, but then the light leaves them and they go still, literally yielding the spotlight to Patchamannie Bernal and Liz Strnad, the teens tied to telephones. Bernal and Strnad show all the awkwardness and excitement of two teenagers inching toward love, circa 1957.

Chris Fissel and Stevie Hayden ably portray Andy and Meredith in their mid-40s, but more focused on their reading than on each other. Robert Garcia and Amanda Mehn build a convincing case that love does survive, giving us an elderly couple with tender familiarity and humor intact. The spotlight continues to move around, revisiting the couple many times at each stage of their life together.

The hidden weapon here is artistic director Gail Dixon-Willden, who arrived in Raton last summer after 14 years teaching theatre in Farmington, twice taking her Piedra Vista High School troupe to state championships. Since earning a masters degree in directing, Dixon-Willden has directed more than 75 productions, including Raton's most

recent incarnation of "A Christmas Carol." Though her influence is layered throughout the production of "Why Do We Laugh", it's most evident in the performances of her young actors, all of whom comfortably and convincingly inhabit their characters. After four years without a theatre program, and just twelve rehearsals over four weeks, this is no small feat.

Producer/sponsor Bill Crary and technical director Cian Hazen brought their considerable experience and talents to the production, aided by impressive work from an all-student crew of Mariah Fleming, Seth Romero, Peyton Richards, Synovia Duncan, Mallorie Richards, and Erica Hopper.

The net result of this combined effort is a 30-minute comedy that is funny, insightful and moving. Back on the couch, the elderly Andrew labors over his own obituary as Meredith knits beside him, adding frequent

corrections to Andrew's memories. In fact, Andrew is having trouble harnessing his memories. We finally come to see, as Andrew does, that these other couples on stage are the stuff of his life, his memories, which one by one leave the stage, leaving us alone with Andrew and Meredith as they turn their attentions...toward dinner.

Raton's teens have created a multi-layered production that would reward multiple viewings. It's too bad there were only two public performances. However, before leaving early Wednesday morning to take their play to the festival in Portales, they'll present an encore performance at the Shuler Theatre Tuesday night at 7:00 pm. Open free to the public this time - they'll be accepting donations - many who saw the show over the weekend will return, glad for another chance.

COLFAX COUNTY CALENDAR

February Feb. 16

6 p.m. - Raton Red Hot Mamas and Foxy Ladies Mardi Gras party. K-Bobs. RSVP Fonda at (575) 445-9783 or Linda at (575) 445-8697.

Feb. 22

11 a.m. - 4 p.m. - Enchilada Dinner. St. Patrick's/St. Joseph's Parish Hall. Diane at (575) 445-7123 or the Parish Hall at (575) 445-9763.

Feb. 22

2:30 p.m. - Robert Post Comedy Theater. Shuler Theater. Presented by Raton Arts and Humanities and Title Services, Inc. Tickets at www.ratonarts.org or (575) 445-2052.

Feb. 24

"On The Road To Living Well With Diabetes" classes to be held Feb. 24, March 31 and

May 19, 2009 beginning at 8:45 a.m. at the Miner's Colfax Medical Center (MCMC) Long Term Care facility (900 S. Sixth St) in Raton. Call (575) 445-8071 to pre-register.

The Colfax County Fair Association Board of Directors would like to announce the dates for the 2009 Colfax County Fair and Rodeo will be Aug. 10-16, 2009. If you have any questions or need additional information please contact: Troy Sauble at (575) 375-2790 or (575) 447-0012; Marlene Nystul at (575) 445-3281; or by email at: colfaxcountyfair@hotmail.com

Feb. 28

7:30 pm - BYU Young Ambassadors. Shuler Theater. Presented by Raton Arts and Humanities and Woody's Furniture. Tickets at www.ratonarts.org or (575) 445-2052

RATON POLICE BLOTTER

Feb. 12, 2009 ARRESTED:

Richard C Trujillo, 24 - Disorderly conduct.

CITATIONS:

Kayle A Cody, 21, - Cited for criminal damage to property.

Shannon Romero - Cited for dog at large.

Julio Sanchez - Cited for a seatbelt violation and driver to be licensed.

CRASHES:

An unknown driver left the scene after striking an unattended vehicle owned by Debra Sandoval, doing moderate damage to the vehicle.

Feb. 13, 2009 ARRESTED:

Robert Fratterelli, 36, - Bench warrant out of Magistrate Court for failure to comply with conditions of probation on open container, shoplifting and resisting charges.

Rebecca Pemandez, 43, - Arrest warrant for forgery, 29 counts.

Christian Ortega, 21, - Arrest order for violations of conditions of parole/probation on charges of resisting/obstructing possession of marijuana, and contributing to the delinquency of a minor.

Thomas Romero, 21 - Bench warrant out of Magistrate court for failure to pay fines/costs previously imposed on charges of criminal trespassing and resisting.

Pricilla Gallegos, 34, - Bench warrant out of Magistrate Court for failure to pay fines/costs previously imposed on charges of a OWL.

CITATIONS:

Andrew Martinez - Falsely obtaining services from RPS and criminal damage to property.

Amber Vargas - No tags on dog, two counts.

Dana Liles - No tags on dog.

Breanna Valdez - Speeding and no insurance.

Darcy Riley - Seatbelt violation.

Nominations sought for Annual Governor's Awards for Excellence in the Arts

Special to the Chronicle

SANTA FE - The New Mexico Arts Commission and New Mexico Arts, a division of the Department of Cultural Affairs, are now accepting nominations for the 2009 Governor's Awards for Excellence in the Arts. Nominations can be submitted by individual New Mexico residents or representatives of businesses or organizations in New Mexico.

Nominations for the Governor's Arts Awards may include individual living artists working in any discipline who have demonstrated outstanding achievement in the arts, individual non-artists who have made significant or distinguished contributions to the arts in New Mexico, and businesses, nonprofits, or foundations with sustained involvement in and support for the arts.

Nominations must be post-marked by March 6, 2009. Nominations may also be hand-delivered no later than March 6. Nomination forms are available online at

www.nmarts.org/awards or contact New Mexico Arts, PO Box 1450, Santa Fe, NM 87504-1450, 505/827-6490, 800/879-4278 (instate), or email virginia.castellano@state.nm.us. A committee of the New Mexico Arts Commission reviews all 2009 nominations and forwards its recommendations to the Governor and First Lady. Winners of this presti-

gious award will be honored September 25, 2009, at a special public awards ceremony hosted by Governor Bill Richardson and First Lady Barbara Richardson.

The awards, established in 1974 by Governor Bruce King and First Lady Alice King, honor outstanding New Mexicans for lifetime achievement in and support of the arts. Last year's recipients include Harry Benjamin of Silver City for Painting; Tammy Garcia of Santa Clara Pueblo for Visual Arts - Pottery, Sculpture and Glass; Jack Loeffler of Santa Fe for Ethnomusicology and Writing; Noel Marquez of Artesia for Painting and Mural Artistry; Eugene Newmann of Ribera for Painting; Ali MacGraw of Tesuque - Major Contributor to the Arts; Eileen A. Wells of Santa Fe - Major Contributor to the Arts; and KHFM Radio 95.5 of Albuquerque - Major Contributor to the Arts.

New Mexico Arts, a division of the Department of Cultural Affairs, is the state arts agency. New Mexico Arts administers the state's One Percent for Public Art program, awards grants to nonprofit organizations for arts and cultural programs in their communities across the state, and provides technical assistance and educational opportunities for organizations, artists, and arts educators throughout New Mexico.



The Sanchez property on North Fifth Street, one of the condemned properties that has been a public concern as a danger and an eyesore, is cleared of debris.

(Photo by Laura L. Brewer)



Christi Medina and Donna Emiro serve customers at the concession stand during the free public showing of *The Spiderwicke Chronicles* at the El Raton on Saturday. The owners provide a free movie to the public on the second Saturday of every month as a way of thanking the community for supporting the theater and keeping it open in Raton. This month's free movie was sponsored by Woody's Furniture.

(Photo by Laura L. Brewer)