

'Cheating Cheaters' doesn't skimp on laughs at Shuler

By Tim Keller
Special to The Chronicle-News

RATON — Billed as “a comedy to celebrate,” last weekend’s production of John Patrick’s play “Cheating Cheaters” seemed designed to raise its audiences from the winter doldrums on the occasion of flowering spring.

The community theater production brought a small cast of three women, two men, and one dog to improbable shenanigans on the Shuler Theater stage.

In New York City, a pair of middle-aged sisters support their orphaned niece’s European art school studies by sitting in subway stations dressed as nuns with donation buckets.

The audience’s first encounter with nun Desiree Martinez is when she arrives home to her apartment and slugs straight from a bottle of Jack Daniels taken from behind a Bible on the shelf. Let the comedy begin.

Older sister (both meanings intended) Janese Little thinks the jig is up when discovered by young cat burglar Nathan Coleman, but he turns out to be a student financing his own medical education through crime.

When they’re all discovered by police officer Bozo Fettuccini (formerly Fink), played by Cian Hazen, prospects look grim until it turns out that Bozo, too, is a cheater. They all throw in together.

Director Gail Dixon-Willden auditioned dogs from the Raton Animal

Shelter for an important part in the play. Credited as “And Introducing Holly,” new canine actor Holly earned her billing by hitting all her marks and being cute enough to remind why actors often don’t like competing with an animal for attention on stage. (Although it was Coleman who partnered with Holly on stage, it’s Martinez who has adopted her and taken her home.)

When art student niece Haley James shows up unexpectedly, her aunts feel forced to abandon their nuns’ habits, but that eliminates their only source of income. No problem: it turns out that the niece has built quite a career as a European art forger. All’s well that ends well.

Although audience laughter ranging from snickers to guffaws regularly punctuated the proceedings, Thursday’s opening night performance often felt long and slow. The cast may have been able to pick up the pacing of their lines in subsequent performances Saturday and Sunday.

A 90-minute first act followed by a 30-minute second act seemed out of balance, though playwright Patrick was successful and prolific for more than 50 years, earning both a Tony Award and Pulitzer Prize in 1954.

His 1981 “Cheating Cheaters” was a relatively minor concoction designed for easy laughs, which often felt just right last weekend with the emergence of the full flowering of spring outside.



Tim Keller/Special to The Chronicle-News

Above, scam-artist nun Janese Little is irritated with the imposition of whipper-snapper Nathan Coleman in the comedy “Cheating Cheaters” at the Shuler Theater last weekend.

At left, for a cast of cheaters (plus one dog), things turned out just fine at the end of last weekend’s “Cheating Cheaters.” From left are Desiree Martinez, Janese Little, Holly, Nathan Coleman, and Haley James. Also featured was Cian Hazen.

Three Dougherty siblings sentenced for Colorado crimes

By P. Solomon Banda
Associated Press

WALSENBURG — The last of three siblings accused in a multistate crime spree was sentenced Monday to 18 years in prison on charges related to their capture in Colorado.

Ryan Dougherty, 22, had faced up to 20 years after pleading guilty to five counts of menacing.

Earlier Monday, Dougherty’s sister Lee Grace Dougherty received a 24-year prison term, while his brother Dylan Stanley-Dougherty was given 32 years.

The three are accused of shooting at a police officer and staging a daring bank robbery in a cross-country crime spree that included Georgia and Florida. The manhunt for them ended after an Aug. 10 freeway chase and shootout with police in southeastern Colorado.

The trio led police on a high-speed chase that went through Trinidad before they were captured near Starkville.

The sentencing hearings effectively end the siblings’ stay in Colorado as Georgia authorities await their extradition. The U.S. Marshals Service will transport them to Albany, Ga., for a May 15 court hearing.

Lee Grace Dougherty, 29, had faced up to 28 years in prison after pleading guilty to first-degree assault and two counts of menacing. In court Monday, the judge told her that as the oldest of the three siblings, she should have shown better judgment.



Associated Press

Dylan Stanley Dougherty, 27, Monday pleads for a lighter sentence as he stands with his attorney Kobe Becker, left, in district court where he was sentenced to 32 years in prison on charges stemming from the shootout and capture of him and his brother and sister in Colorado in Walsenburg.

“I’d like to say it was a lapse in judgment, but 10 days is not a lapse in judgment,” Lee Grace Dougherty said. “It was bad, poor judgment.”

The 27-year-old Dylan received the maximum prison sentence for his guilty plea to one charge of first-degree assault related to the chase and shootout in Colorado.

As part of plea deals,

Colorado prosecutors agreed to drop multiple counts of attempted second-degree murder against the siblings.

In Georgia, the three face firearms and other charges in an Aug. 2 bank robbery in Valdosta. Witnesses say two men and a woman, dressed in black and wearing masks, entered a bank just over the Florida state line and fired shots

into the ceiling. One carried an AK-47 type assault rifle and an automatic pistol, similar to weapons recovered after the siblings’ capture in Colorado.

The trio made off with about \$5,200 and had spent about \$1,000 of it by the time police caught up with them in Colorado, authorities said.

Sue McKinney, a spokeswoman for the U.S. attorney

for the Middle District of Georgia, did not return a message seeking comment.

The three are charged with firing shots at a police officer in Zephyrhills, Fla., some 210 miles south of Valdosta, during a high-speed chase earlier on Aug. 2.

In Florida, the siblings are charged with fleeing or eluding and attempted second-degree murder of a law enforcement officer. Convictions could mean life sentences, according to court officials. Ryan Dougherty also is charged with grand theft auto.

Florida authorities said the three had been living together in Lacochee, about 45 miles northeast of Tampa, and each had a criminal record.

Before the alleged crime spree, Ryan Dougherty was sentenced to register as a sex offender for sending sexually explicit text messages to an 11-year-old girl. His mother, Barbara Bell of East Palatka, Fla., said her son feared the conviction would prohibit him from seeing his newborn son.

Lee Grace Dougherty said in court that her actions were prompted by her desire to protect Ryan.

“My motivation in all of this is I could not lose another sibling,” she said, referring to a sister who died of an illness. “He’s not only my brother, he is my best friend.”

Dylan Stanley-Dougherty’s lawyer, Kobe Becker, also portrayed his client as a loyal family member who was desperate to help his younger brother. But Judge Claude Appel

didn’t buy the explanation.

“You’re saving your brother from a probation sentence, for crying out loud, not a prison sentence,” he said of the siblings’ efforts to prevent Ryan from having to register.

Bruce Bartlett, chief assistant state attorney for Florida’s 6th Judicial District, said authorities there are seeking extradition.

“We’ll be seeking sentences that ensure they spend most of their life in prison, if not all of it, so if and when they were to get out of prison they would no longer pose a threat to everyone,” Bartlett said in a phone interview.

Ryan Dougherty told authorities in Colorado that the trio hoped to escape to Mexico. The siblings told investigators they traveled across the country in a stolen car, taking back roads to avoid detection.

Lee Grace Dougherty was shot in the knee when she pointed a gun at a police officer after the trio rolled their car on Interstate 25 in Colorado.

Prosecutors say that Dylan Stanley-Dougherty was the one who fired an assault rifle at pursuing officers before the siblings’ capture in Colorado, and was also the one who fired at a police officer in Florida and a bank robbery in Georgia. During the hearing, he told the judge he was sorry and didn’t want to hurt anyone. “It is true that I acted out of desperation, and I am sorry for choices that I made,” he said.

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