

Shuler Theater celebrating 100th birthday in style

Tim Keller — For the Comet | Posted: Saturday, April 25, 2015 1:00 am

RATON – One hundred years ago, Raton was a thriving young town whose ample commerce was built around the railroad, ranches and mines. Most of the population had emigrated from Europe to fill the new jobs, and their old-world hometowns had opera houses. Raton’s mayor, Dr. James Jackson Shuler, spearheaded a drive for Raton to build its own opera house. Construction took only eight months and the new building housed not only the theater, but also city hall, the fire department, the police department, and the jail.

The grand opening was celebrated April 27, 1915, with a big touring musical called “The Red Rose,” presented in the magnificent new theater. In a run-up to Monday’s 100th birthday celebration, impresario Bill Fegan and the rest of the theater company are throwing a big party in the form of a loose-knit musical variety show they’re calling “The Centennial Rose.” Many actors, dancers, and singers that have performed on the Shuler stage over the last 50 years will return this weekend to join the shows—and each show will be different than the others.

Three unique performances of “The Centennial Rose” will be presented over the weekend beginning Saturday at 7:00 p.m. A Sunday matinee presents the all-ages show at 2 p.m. The biggest show, though, arrives Monday at 7 p.m. on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Shuler’s first show. Monday night’s performance will be followed by a champagne reception and celebration next door at the Isabel Castillo Performing Arts Center, with champagne, punch and light food catered by Lucy Romero.

Adrienne Coleman is co-producing the show with Fegan, and they expect the lineup to keep shaping up right until performers take the stage, with former Kaleidoscope Players such as David Ode, Ben Zeller and Dorothy Thompson Smoker coming from Santa Fe and other cities to perform whatever they like—a show full of surprises and changing each time.



Raton’s magnificent Shuler Theater fills with excitement and rich red festivity this weekend as it celebrates the 100-year anniversary of its first show.

A big musical called “The Red Rose” opened the new opera house on April 27, 1915. This weekend’s new musical variety show, “The Centennial Rose,” will be co-produced by Adrienne Coleman, shown at right in a December 2012 production of “Miracle on 34th Street” with Elizabeth Record (left) and Jillian Solano.

Fegan's willing to reveal what he's got in store. "I'll be playing Henry Higgins, singing 'I've Grown Accustomed to Her Face' from My Fair Lady, a part I played here in 1968. We'll all be reviving songs and dances and scenes that we've done here on the Shuler stage over the last 50 years, basically since I first arrived with the Kaleidoscope Players in 1963."

Fegan will be accompanied on the theater's Steinway grand piano by jazz singer Carol Simmons, who will contribute a solo performance in addition to accompanying other performers. The Willow Springs Singers, Raton Glee and Kids Chorale will each perform. Fegan expects John Martin to sing a song from Camelot, and Fegan will probably tell the story of Evelyn Shuler, Dr. James Shuler's daughter whose ghost seems to linger at the theater on show nights, having a preference for seat D1.

"We all have stories to tell," Fegan says, and he expects tales and from the returning performers, all of whom are seasoned entertainers. New Mexico Magazine's April issue features a four-page article on Fegan and the Shuler Centennial, so past Kaleidoscope Players aren't likely to be the only ones driving in from far-flung places for the shows.

"There will be several dance numbers in each show, and songs from the many musicals we've presented over the years," Fegan says. "We also have some exciting surprise announcements to make about our future, and a table in the lobby where we'll have Shuler Centennial t-shirts and other products for sale."

The musical variety show "The Centennial Rose" will be presented Saturday and Monday nights at 7 p.m., plus a Sunday matinee at 2 p.m. All seats are general admission and free. For more information, contact the Shuler Theater at 131 N. 2nd St., (575) 445-4746.