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Six actors, 29 rolls in 'Red Herring'

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By **RANDALL G. MIELKE** For Sun-Times Media

It may not be solid math, but when the Noble Fool Theatricals present Red Herring at Pheasant Run Resort & Spa in St. Charles beginning on Thursday, Sept. 2, the numbers add up to 29 equaling six. Six actors and actresses (Sean Bolger, Alex Hugh Brown, Danon Dastugue, Peter DeFaria, Elana Ernst and Rebekah Ward-Hayes) portray 29 different characters in the show.

"We have three couples," said director John Gawlik about the characters. "The main character, Maggie, is police detective. She only has the one role. The other five actors and actresses play five or six different characters each. So six actors and actresses play 29 different characters in the play."

Written by Michael Hollinger, Red Herring combines three love stories, a murder mystery and espionage into a Cold War-era romantic comedy. The play, which is set in 1952, follows the attempts of these three couples to overcome the obstacles that stand in the way of love and marriage.

"We have a running list of scenes and characters," continued Gawlik, referring to how everything is kept organized. "We have a dressing section just off stage because we cannot take time to go to the dressing rooms. A stage hand helps the actors with their changes as they put on a different shirt, or different glasses, or different hair.

"There could be a quirky guy at the morgue, and then he puts on a lab coat to be another character, or in the next scene he has a general's uniform on," Gawlik said. "It adds another element to the show. There is a sense of urgency. The audience is thinking 'How did he make that change so fast?'"

Another element added to the play is the filmed sequences used for scene transitions and in the play's opening.

"The concept was to pay homage to cinematic visuals," Gawlik said. "We have a giant movie screen and we use the screen for our scene transitions. When the scene is set in Wisconsin, on the screen there will be a house. Then out from off stage comes a couch, a table and a TV. In another scene there is a dock and a railing from a military ship and with the filmed sequence behind them, it is like the actors are on the bow of the ship."

The opening sequence was filmed in and around St. Charles. With permission from the city, Gawlik wanted to celebrate the great film noir tradition of Humphrey Bogart in *The Big Sleep* and film classics like *Double Indemnity* and *Laura*. The filming for the play's opening scene started at 8 a.m. on a Wednesday morning and was completed at about 1 a.m. the next day.

"St. Charles has great 1930s and 1940s architecture," Gawlik said. "We shot the opening sequence with most of the actors and shot a lot of it at night. But it was a long day."

Gawlik believes that the appeal of the play is its spirit and the tribute to the films of the 1940s and 1950s.

"There is a strong heart to this play," he said. "The characters are struggling. They are hopelessly in love and they try to work something out.

"And it is a celebration of that era," he continued. "People like Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall are really celebrated with this comedy."

kessy3487 wrote:

Just an FYI...in the headline it should read "29 roles" not "29 rolls." Role = actor's character, roll = piece of bread :) Sorry, the former newspaper editor in me couldn't resist. Other than that, great article. Can't wait to see the show! NFT does great work.

8/28/2010 8:40 AM CDT on suburbanchicagonews.com

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