

RECENT ARTICLES IN THE POLK CO. PULSE THE MENA STAR AND OTHER MEDIA SOURCES

August 29, 2010

STEEL MAGNOLIAS AT OLT THIS WEEKEND HONORS NEW YORK GIVES BACK

This Friday, Saturday, and Sunday evening, at 7:30 PM, September 3-5, the Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT) will provide performances of the time-honored Southern comedy/drama *Steel Magnolias* on its stage at 610 Mena St. These performances coincide with the visit of the *New York Gives Back* organization that will be visiting the area to help rebuild houses damaged in the April 2009 tornado, and the Saturday night performance will be free to the New York group, and anyone else who wishes to attend. . Tickets for Friday and Sunday's performances are \$8.00, \$5.00 for students and seniors, 60 and over.

The OLT has formed a new division called *OLT on the Road*, directed by co-chairs Tim Hesse and Larry Block. This division's purpose will be to perform plays of general appeal to venues within about a 100 mile radius of Mena, many of them other community theaters like the OLT, itself. Hesse will be the creative director of this organization, while Block will handle the business end of things.

Each of these plays, which are not regularly scheduled OLT performances, intended strictly for Mena, will have a short run here, probably for one weekend, as they are doing with *Steel Magnolias*, directed by Hesse. This play will be performed again on September 10 and 11th, as a dinner theater event at Spinelli's Café at the north end of Mena, and then will go to its first road location on November 6, at the Royal Theater in Benton. Other venues under consideration include the King Opera House in Van Buren, and the Center for the Arts in El Dorado.

It is not by accident that the premiere of *Steel Magnolias* was scheduled for this coming weekend. Like many other civic organizations in Polk County, the OLT is grateful for the help with tornado recovery provided by the *New York Gives Back* organization, and wishes to both honor and provide entertainment for them, for free, while they are here. As seating permits, anyone else in the community who is involved with the tornado recovery is also welcome to the free performance on Saturday night. For more information contact the OLT Information Line at 479-243-0186 or visit OLT's website at www.oltmena.com

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August 22, 2010

3RD ANNUAL CHURCH BAND EXTRAVAGANZA AT OLT THIS SATURDAY NIGHT

By

Larry Block

What started out two years ago, this month, with the provocative name, "OLT's Battle of the Church Bands," will be celebrating its third appearance, with a new name – *OLT's Church Band Extravaganza*! Though it never was actually a battle between the church praise and worship teams, some people were uncomfortable with the idea that the OLT might be pitting the bands against each other.

Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT) board member, Larry Block, who came up with the event, named it, and remains its organizer and Master of Ceremonies, was quick to point out that the income from the show was divided evenly among the four bands, but still concern about the name continued. Finally, this year Block renamed it *OLT's Church Band Extravaganza*. It will occur this year, on Saturday night August 28, at 7:30 PM. Tickets which go on sale at the OLT, 610 Mena street, 45 minutes before the show, are \$7.00 for adults, \$5.00 for students and seniors 60 and over.

The format of the event, since its inception, has not changed. Four local church bands are selected, and each of them perform for about a half hour. There is an intermission between the end of the first two bands in the beginning of the third and fourth. Different bands have appeared over the years, with some overlap. This year, three bands from large churches that have appeared before, include *The Crossing*, *Grace Bible Church*, and *Dallas Avenue Baptist Church*. The fourth band, a new entry, and an idea that Block came up with in order to represent smaller churches, will be a band made up of the praise and worship teams of three small churches, including *Bethel Christian Fellowship*, *Church of God*, and *Feed My Sheep*.

"in the past, we were really only able to invite large churches to perform, so we would get complete musical and singing organizations into the show," Block said. "I was trying to figure out a way to get the smaller churches represented, and Amanda Webb, the praise and worship leader at *Bethel Christian Fellowship* suggested we combine several bands. It's worked out very well. The three bands have been rehearsing for the show at the *Church of God* over the past month or so, and are eager to perform on Saturday."

OLT's Church Band Extravaganza has been very popular in his first two years. The music is lively, exciting, and always very inspirational for the audience. Lyrics to all of the Christian songs are projected on a screen so the audience is able, and welcome to sing along with the teams. This year's event promises to be the best yet. For more information call the OLT information line at 479-243-0186, or visit www.oltmena.com.

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August 15, 2010

OLT LAUNCHES 5-YEAR PLAN TO BETTER SERVE COMMUNITY

By

Larry Block

One of the first goals of newly elected Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT) President, Janelle Baldwin, when she took office in May of this year, was to launch an effort to evaluate how the OLT serves the community currently, and how, over the next few years, it can do an even better job.

She begin by securing the services of Jaclyn Keeter, Rich Mountain Community College's Director of Development, who volunteered to facilitate a strategic planning retreat for the OLT board. Keeter employed an analysis and planning method known as SWOT, which is simply an abbreviation for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

The retreat was held on July 10, in a meeting room at the First Presbyterian Church. At the all-day meeting, Keeter led the group through an in-depth set of breakout-team evaluation exercises. The topics of these exercises included the evaluation of the OLT on the four topics included in SWOT.

Board members, which include Rene Alcorn, Baldwin, Larry Block, Theresa Erwin, Bill Hays, Tim Hesse, Liz Kast, Judy Kropp, Jay Rodgers, Brad Storey, Rudi Timmerman, and Scott Vacca, most of whom were there, worked intensively, using flip charts, to list what they consider to be all the elements of each of these four topics, and then got back together with the entire Board to share their observations. Guests at the retreat were Tom Baldwin and Hugh Erwin, who participated equally with Board members. The outcome of this meeting was a comprehensive report prepared by Keeter, which she then delivered to Baldwin.

"The retreat was only the first step," commented Baldwin. "Now the real work begins." Since July 10, Baldwin has chaired two more special meetings of the board to begin working on all the elements of planning for the next five years that came out of the retreat. The board met on August 3 and again on August 11 to create committees to execute planning that will come out of what was learned at the retreat.

"Our goal is to keep the OLT as a vital, growing, integral part of the Polk County community. We have made great strides in the last few years, with workshops, lots of activities for kids, plays that the community has embraced, musical events, and even winning the 2009-10 Arkansas State Community Theater Championship," Baldwin said. "With a good plan, that looks forward to the needs of the community, we hope to be able to do an even better job than the OLT did in the past." For more information about OLT activities call the OLT information line at 479 – 243 – 0186, or visit OLT's website, www.oltmena.com.

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August 8, 2010

JOLT REVIVES KROPP AWARDS THIS FRIDAY NIGHT

By

Larry Block

Some people think that change isn't always good, but in the case of a recent change at the Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT), a change of presidents is working out very well, especially for the junior arm of the theater, JOLT. Judy Kropp, who had been president of the OLT for the last seven years, decided it was time for change, and relinquished the reins to long-time OLT Secretary, Janelle Baldwin. However, instead of enjoying some time off, Kropp immediately accepted the role of Adult Advisor to JOLT, a role also held for a very long time, by her predecessor, Kammie Sweeten.

It turns out that Kropp founded JOLT herself, years ago, and one of the ways she recognized excellence in the organization was by providing awards to the kids involved in JOLT shows and other activities. Like the Benson Awards, named after Leda Benson, the founder of the OLT, which are given out every other year for excellence in the adult organization, the awards given in JOLT were also given out every other year. Awards were given for bests in acting, directing, stage management, technical work, makeup, set building, and other theatrical skills.

The JOLT awards, however, were discontinued about 10 years ago. With the re-arrival of Kropp as the Adult Advisor, the awards, named after her, as founder, are being reinstated, this year. The first awards activity will be this Friday, August 13, at the OLT, at 610 Mena St., where JOLT will have a party, as well as the ceremony to give the Kropp Awards.

The JOLT Kropp Awards Party will begin at 5 PM, with the awards ceremony coming first, followed by dinner, and JOLT party activities, including theater games. The entire event is planned to run until midnight. Anyone who wishes to attend is welcome. The cost to attend the ceremony and dinner for JOLT members is \$5.00. Ceremony-only attendance for members is \$2.50. Non-members may attend the ceremony and dinner for \$7.00, \$3.50 for the awards ceremony, only.

Membership in JOLT is open to any children from kindergarten through high school graduation. The annual membership fee is \$10.00. JOLT produces one or two plays every year, at the theater and has its own Board, chaired this year by Acorn High School senior, Logan Sweeten. They also have activities almost every month which include overnight lock-ins, workshops, and other theater-oriented activities. For more information about JOLT or *The JOLT Kropp Awards Party*, call the OLT information line at 479-243-0186.

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August 1, 2010

OLT TO HOLD AUDITIONS FOR *LOST IN YONKERS* NEXT WEEK

By

Larry Block

Audition time is coming up for the Neil Simon comedic play, *Lost in Yonkers*, which will be performed the first three weekends in October, at the Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT). The play will be directed by OLT's new board president, Janelle Baldwin. Open audition dates are Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday August 9, 10 and 12, from 6 to 9 PM, and Saturday, August 14, from 10 AM to 3 PM. The auditions will take place on the stage at the OLT at 610 Mena St.

Lost in Yonkers focuses on the brothers Arty. and Jay, left in the care of their Grandma Kurnitz and Aunt Bella in Yonkers, New York in 1942. Their desperate father, Eddie, works as a traveling salesman to pay off debts incurred by the death of his wife. Grandma Kurnitz is a severe, frightfully intimidating immigrant who terrifies everyone around her. Bella is a sweet, but mentally slow woman who longs to be married and escape the oppressive household. This comedy with a serious side looks at family ties and relationships, and the events that shape them.

Baldwin will be casting for the following actors: two young men, ages 10 to 16; two men ages 25 to 40; two women ages 25 to 40; and one woman aged 50 to 70. No acting experience or knowledge of this play is necessary to audition. At the time of the auditions, Baldwin will distribute parts of the script to prospective actors, and ask them to read both alone and in conjunction with other participants in the audition. In addition to parts in the play, there will be other opportunities for people who would like to get involved with the OLT. For example backstage crew positions will be available in set design, construction and painting, hair and makeup, and costuming.

For further information Baldwin can be reached directly at 870-389-6247, or 479-243-6486. A poster regarding the auditions as well as an audition form can be found and filled out in advance at OLT's website, www.oltmena.com. Click on auditions for the poster and audition form. Additional information may also be accessed by calling the OLT info line at 479-243-0186.

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July 25, 2010

OLT LAUNCHES QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

After seven years at the helm of the Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT), Judy Kropp has happily turned the reins over to new Board President, Janelle Baldwin. However, instead of beginning a quiet retirement from an OLT leadership role, Mrs. Kropp immediately took on the role of Adult Advisor for the junior arm of the OLT, JOLT, a happy circumstance for everyone.

In *her* new role, Baldwin has committed to providing ongoing information to the community about OLT activities, via a newsletter which will be published at least quarterly, and may even be published more often. This newsletter will not only contain information about OLT plays and performances, but it will also keep the community up-to-date on behind the scenes activities at the OLT, like remodeling, or addition of new technical equipment, etc.

Direct recipients of the newsletter include OLT members, prospective members, performance attendees, actors, Chamber members, and other interested parties both in the Polk County community as well as in other parts of the region. It will be disseminated in print, and via e-mail, and will also be able to be viewed in the OLT website, at www.oltmena.com.

The first edition of the newsletter, July 2010, is just going out, now. It includes a President's Corner, from Baldwin, which will be a regular inclusion, as well as articles about OLT board members and officers, information about joining the OLT, and an Upcoming Events section.

In Upcoming Events, Baldwin talks about the success of *The Hobbit*, the JOLT play which was just concluded, *Lost in Yonkers*, the play she will be directing in October, and reveals exciting news about OLT's new repertory unit, which will be performing *Steel Magnolias* for both the *New York Says Thank You* group and local audiences in early September.

"A lot of people in our area don't even know that the OLT is the Arkansas State Community Theater champion for 2009–2010," Baldwin said. "We would like to get more members of our community involved in the theater, which is a 100% volunteer organization. There is a place for everyone, from little kids through the oldest members of our community, whether it is on stage, backstage, or helping sell tickets or concessions at our performances, and we hope our newsletter will help bring more community attention to the theater." To receive a free copy of the newsletter, whenever it is published, call the OLT information line at (479) 243-0186, or send an e-mail to the OLT at oltmena@gmail.com.

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July 18, 2010

HIGH SCHOOL GRADS IN LAST PERFORMANCE IN *HOBBIT* AT OLT

The last football, basketball, baseball, and volleyball game of the year is always sentimental, as the Seniors play in their last games of their high school careers. So, why not recognize the graduating members of the junior arm of the Ouachita Little Theatre (JOLT), as they provide their last performance at the OLT?

The JOLT play that is being performed for the last time this Friday and Saturday, July 23 and 24 at 7:30 PM and Sunday, July 25, at 2:30 PM is *The Hobbit*, J. R. R. Tolkien's forerunner to his *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. It is a fantasy adventure that takes place in an imaginary part of the world known as middle earth. With excellent acting, costumes, set, and technical effects, the play delighted attendees of all ages, last weekend.

While the entire cast and crew is made up of local kids from ages 7 to 18, a number of them will be appearing in their last JOLT performance, though they may go on and appear in plays put on by the adult OLT organization. All of the members of the JOLT organization who have just graduated from high school will be going on to college at various locations around the state.

Carrie Randolph, *The Hobbit* director, just graduated from Mena High School. She has been involved in numerous plays, not only at the OLT, and for JOLT, but also in Mena High School drama performances, under the direction of Theater Arts teacher, Jessica Kropp. Randolph has always preferred a behind-the-scenes role in the productions in which she has been involved. She has been the backstage manager in several, and an assistant director, but *The Hobbit* is her first directorial experience. This fall she will begin studying nursing at Southern Arkansas University, in Magnolia.

Theodore "T. J." Schoeppey, Stage Manager and Gandolph, like Randolph, just graduated from Mena High School. He will be studying to be a high school speech and drama teacher at Arkansas Tech, in Russellville. Another Mena High grad, Randall Pochmara, who is the Assistant Stage Manager and plays the Attendant Goblin, will be attending Rich Mountain Community College. The fourth Mena High grad is Felicia Blume, playing Essie. She'll be in the nursing program at the University of Arkansas at Ft. Smith, in the fall. Chris Kuskie, playing Thorin, the King of the Dwarfs, just graduated high school in New Mexico and moved to Mena.

Other high school graduates this year who have been very involved in JOLT and OLT plays include, Brent Bell, Michael Berry, Lauren Bollmeyer, Charissa Henderson, Adam and Ryan Matejek, Bin Miller, Ethan Moe, Erik Owens and Micheal Sterner.

Just as attendees of "last games for Seniors" in the sports arena celebrate the participants, so will audiences celebrate the "last plays" for JOLT Seniors as they give their last performances as kids. For more information about *The Hobbit* or other OLT activities call the OLT information line, (479) 243-0186 or visit the OLT website, www.oltmena.com.

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July 11, 2010

THE HOBBIT AT THE OLT STARTS THIS FRIDAY

By

Larry Block

The long-awaited debut of Tolkien's *The Hobbit* is this Friday evening at 7:30 PM. JOLT, the junior arm of the Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT), is presenting this play. It will run for two weekends, Friday and Saturday, July 16 and 17, at 7:30 PM, and Sunday, July 18, at 2:30 PM. The same will occur the following weekend, July 23 and 24, at 7:30 PM, and July 25, at 2:30 PM. Tickets, at \$7.00 for adults and \$5.00 for students and seniors, 60 and over, will be available at the OLT, 610 Mena Street, 45 minutes before each performance.

The cast of this classic fantasy adventure story is made up of local kids, ages 7 through 18. The director is Carrie Randolph, who just graduated from Mena High School, and will be attending Southern Arkansas University, in the nursing program, this fall. The adult advisor for this play is former OLT Board President, actor and director, Eddie Huckaby.

The part of Bilbo Baggins, the Hobbit, will be played by 12-year-old Cove seventh-grader, Ariana Kelley, who played Pony Boy in JOLT's *The Outsiders*, as well as the lead in *The Velveteen Rabbit*, also a JOLT production. Other key roles are played by T.J. Schoeppey, as the Wizard, Gandolph; Acorn Senior, Logan Sweeten as The Gollum; Katelin Haines as The Elvin Queen; and Chris Kuskie as the Dwarf King, Thorin.

In addition to all of the parts in the play being played by local kids, most of the backstage crew members are also young people. For example, the stage manager is Schoeppey, who, like Randolph has just graduated from Mena High. The costumer and Assistant Director is Mena High Senior, Anne Beckel, the lighting technician is Bethel Christian School Junior, Charles Webb, and the publicity director for this play and the JOLT organization, is Kelley.

With an excellent set and costumes, plus a lot of rehearsal time under their belts, the cast and crew of *The Hobbit* are looking forward to presenting a delightful play for audiences of all ages over the next two weekends.

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Ouachita Little Theatre

2009 ARKANSAS COMMUNITY THEATER STATE CHAMPION

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610 Mena St.
Mena, AR. 71953
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MEDIA ALERT

TOLKIEN PLAY *THE HOBBIT* OPENS AT OLT IN MENA, AR ON JULY 16

- WHAT:** The play of the classic story *The Hobbit* by J. R. R. Tolkien will be performed by the junior arm (JOLT) of Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT)
- WHEN:** Friday, July 16 and Saturday, July 17, at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, July 18 at 2:30 p.m.
Friday, July 23 and Saturday, July 24, at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, July 25 at 2:30 p.m.
- WHERE:** Ouachita Little Theatre, 610 Mena St., Mena, AR 71953
- TICKET INFO:** \$7.00 for Adults, \$5.00 for students and seniors, 60 and over.

BACKGROUND: The classic, *The Hobbit*, is being presented from the junior arm of the OLT (JOLT). This story is the forerunner of Tolkien's famous trilogy, *Lord of the Rings*. Directed by 18-year old Carrie Randolph, the cast consists of kids from 6-18. The adult wing of the OLT is the primary arm of this state champion community theater company, and is producing several plays this year, including *Lost in Yonkers* in October. Some years JOLT does two plays, including the December holiday season performance, however, this year JOLT will only be presenting *The Hobbit*.

This young cast will provide a very professional performance utilizing an excellent set, costumes, and technical support. This is a play for the whole family, filled with mystery, suspense, drama, action, and excitement -- something anybody will enjoy.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: The Ouachita Little Theatre Info Line (479) 243-0186 or the OLT website www.olt.mena.com

MEDIA ONLY: Larry Block (479) 243-0812 or larry@blockandblock.com

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July 1, 2010

EDITOR'S NOTE: Ariana Kelley is going into the seventh grade at Cove High School. She is the Publicity Director for JOLT and is featured as Bilbo Baggins in *The Hobbit*.

HOBBIT AT OLT A FAMILIAR STORY FOR ALL AGES

By

Ariana Kelley

The Hobbit, a play written by Patricia Gray, based on the book of the same name by well-known and revered writer, Professor J.R.R. Tolkien, is a story of dwarves, elves, wizards, and hobbits. They will all come to life at the Ouachita Little Theatre, 610 Mena St., from July 16-18 and 23-25, in a production presented by JOLT, the junior arm of the Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT). Performance times are 7:30 PM on Fridays and Saturdays, 2:30 PM on Sundays.

The play is the only one which will be produced by JOLT this year. It has a cast and crew of about 30, mostly under 18 years of age, and is directed by Carrie Randolph, who has just graduated from Mena High School. Eddie Huckaby is the Adult Advisor for this play

The story of *The Hobbit* begins when a run-of-the-shire hobbit, a small human-like creature, named Bilbo Baggins, prepares to have his deepest wish granted -- an adventure. Dwarves, which he encounters, on the other hand, live for quests. Their leader, Thorin, is tough and determined. He is also prince of a place called *Under the Mountain*. Gandalf is a wizard, the bravest and wisest of his time. He helps to set up Thorin's quest by sending with him what Gandalf believes to be an incompetent companion, Bilbo Baggins.

On this adventure, everyone will face some terrible experiences, where some may be eaten by trolls or goblins, and some may die of starvation or exhaustion. Some may even make it the whole way, only to be eaten by the mighty dragon Smaug. The name strikes fear into one's heart, but Thorin is on a quest to slay the dragon and to take back stolen treasure, so he perseveres.

With teamwork, battles, and courage, the team might pull it together and make it out alive. This heroic story goes through tough, tired times to hard, exhausting times, to victory and triumph! JOLT proudly presents *The Hobbit*. Tickets, on sale at the door 45 minutes before each performance are \$7.00 for adults, \$5.00 for students and seniors 60 and over. For more information call the OLT information line at (479) 243-0186, or visit the OLT website www.oltmena.com.

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June 27, 2010

JUNIOR OLT PROVIDES KIDS VALUABLE LIFE-LEARNING EXPERIENCES

By

Larry Block

Nearly 30 kids from 5 to 18 will participate in the Junior Ouachita Little Theatre (JOLT) summer play, *The Hobbit* from July 16-18 and 23-25, 2010. Each year JOLT produces one or two plays. There is always one JOLT play in the summer, and then during the December holiday season JOLT alternates with the OLT to produce the holiday play. This year *The Hobbit* will be the only play JOLT produces, but being in the play is only a small part of what being involved in JOLT means.

As its name indicates, JOLT is the junior arm of the Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT), Polk County's venue for plays and other events, many of them musical. One of the main missions of the OLT is to encourage children to become involved in theater arts. Mena High School has a theater arts program, directed by Jessica Kropp, and many of the students in her program got their start, and especially built their interest, via participation in JOLT, beginning as early as the age of 5.

So, beside for getting to act in plays, what does JOLT offer Polk County kids? The possibilities are endless. A great after-school activity, being part of a team, the opportunity to build speaking skills, and improve self-confidence, are just a few examples. When JOLT members are not building stage sets and rehearsing for plays, they have regular meetings, lock-in sleepovers at the theater, play theater-oriented games, and work with each other to learn both acting and behind-the-scenes skills. Lifelong friendships are begun this way. Many of the actors seen in OLT plays got started in theater as members of JOLT.

JOLT is almost completely comprised of kids, except for the participation of a few adult advisors. The board of the organization is totally made up of local kids. JOLT president, Logan Sweeten is going into his senior year at Acorn High School. He has acted in numerous JOLT and OLT plays, and in fact directed last year's JOLT holiday play *The Velveteen Rabbit* and was the assistant director on one of this year's OLT plays, *The Red Lamp*. Other officers of JOLT, all of them very active in onstage, and behind-the-scenes JOLT activities are vice president, Jordan Pennington, secretary, Delani Moe, and treasurer, Lizzie Sutherland.

Judy Kropp, the librarian at Mena High School, who for the last seven years has been president of the OLT and just turned the reins of the organization over to Janelle Baldwin, immediately volunteered to be the new JOLT Adult Advisor, replacing Kammie Sweeten who, like Kropp was for OLT, has been in that position for many years. She will continue to be active with JOLT and work with Kropp through her son Logan's senior year at Acorn High.

The cost of belonging to JOLT is minimal, only \$10 per year. If you are looking for a great local growth opportunity for your kids, JOLT is well worth looking into. For more information, contact the OLT information line at (479) 243 -0186.

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June 20, 2010

JUNIOR OLT NAMES CAST OF *THE HOBBIT*

By

Larry Block

After a very busy May and June, the Ouachita Little Theatre(OLT) will be dark until July 16, when the Junior OLT (JOLT) play, *The Hobbit* will take the stage for a two-weekend run.

Every year JOLT puts on one or two plays, always in the summertime, and every other year during the holiday season. This year the one JOLT play that will be performed will be *The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien, play script by Patricia Gray. It will be directed by Carrie Randolph with the assistance of her OLT adult advisor, Eddie Huckaby. Randolph has been involved with the theater all through school, and has just graduated from Mena High School. She will be attending Southern Arkansas University to study nursing, in the fall. Huckaby was president of the OLT in the 1990s and early 2000, and has been an OLT board member for many years.

After extensive auditions, which ended a couple of weeks ago, the cast has been in rehearsal several nights per week. "One of the great things about this play is that it has many parts to be played, some with lots of lines, and some with almost none," commented Randolph. "This gives any kid from age five through eighteen a chance to be a part of things, whether they have acting experience or not. In addition to acting parts, there are lots of other roles to be played, backstage," she went on to say.

Huckaby noted that the beginning of the rehearsals for *The Hobbit*, were different than lots of other OLT or JOLT plays. "We had a lot of kids try out for this play," he said. "It took some of them a few rehearsals to decide whether or not they actually wanted to be in the play. Once that was settled it took us a little while to decide who would be playing what part."

Here are the assignments that Randolph and Huckaby have given for parts in *The Hobbit*: Bilbo- Ariana Kelley; Gandalf- Theodore Schoeppey; Grocery Boy- David Chaney; Great Goblin- Aaron Armstrong; Attendant Goblin- Randall Pochmara; Gollum- Logan Sweeten; Elfin Queen- Katelin Haines; Elf Guard 1- Logan Sweeten; Elf Guard 2- Dragon; Smuag- Aaron Armstrong; Dwarfs: Thorin- Chris Kuskie, Dwalin- Morgan Richmond, Balin- Courtney McDaniel, Kili- Jessie Moe, Fili- Delani Moe, Dori- Ian Cameron, Nori- Kaitlind Bryant, Ori- Ian Bills, Oin- Hayden Curry, Gloin- Genesis Howard, Bifur- Charity Cameron, Bofur- Alexia Howard, Bombur- Travis Warrington: Trolls: Tom- Nathan Haines, Essie- Felica Blume, Bert- Randall Pochmara.

The crew for *The Hobbit* is Assistant Director- Anne Beckel; Stage Manager- T.J. Schoeppey; Assistant Stage Manager- Randall Pochmara; Costumer- Anne Beckel; Lighting Tech- Charles Webb; Sound Tech, Gerry Johnson; and Publicist and Programs- Ariana Kelley assisted by Adult Advisor Larry Block. For more information call the OLT Info Line at (479) 243-0186 or visit the OLT website at www.oltmena.com.

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June 13, 2010

VACCA BROTHERS TO OPEN ELVIS TRIBUTE SHOW AT OLT THIS SATURDAY

By

Larry Block

Just before award-winning Elvis Presley look-alike and sing-alike tribute artist, Tony Witt, takes the stage at the Ouachita little Theatre (OLT), popular local blues/rock/country band, Longbone, will open the show. They are regulars at Spinelli's Café as well as events like *Wings and Wheels*. Members of the band features lead singer/guitarist, Johnny "Longbone" Vacca, his brother and rhythm guitarist Scott Vacca, bassist Gerry Johnson, and percussionist Larry Block. The band will be performing several songs to open the show for Witt.

Tony Witt has been performing his tribute to Elvis since 1989 and has appeared in a variety of venues and events around the south. He is an Arkansas native, from the Little Rock area, and has won many awards. He has years of experience at his craft and has been compared with other top talented Elvis tribute artists. After attending Witt's tribute show, most attendees say that he is the "best Elvis they've ever seen". His talent and his love for Elvis and people comes through in abundance from the stage. He also loves the one-on-one contact with audience members. All this culminates with his natural charm and charisma - the attribute that Elvis fans say sets Tony apart from other tribute artists.

Some of Witt's awards include first place at the *CSRA Images of the King Regional Pre-Qualifier* in Augusta, Georgia, the 2008 Peoples Choice Award Winner at the *Images Of The King World Championship* in Memphis, on August 16, 2008 – an award given to only one participant and awarded based on the votes of the people. Witt was the first place winner at the *Memories of Elvis Contest, an Images of the King Pre-Qualifier* held in Monroe, LA in, 2009, and a finalist at the *2009 Images of the King World Championship* held in Memphis, TN, August 14-15, 2009. He also became a Finalist in the first-ever *Elvis Presley Enterprises Ultimate Elvis Tribute Artist Contest* held at the *Hard Rock Café* on Beale Street in Memphis, in 2009.

Witt's performances are executed tastefully and respectfully, to both the Presley legacy and to the listening audience. While admitting that there can only be one Elvis, he strives to bring to his audience the sound and feel of a Presley performance, both to the seasoned fan and the inexperienced listener.

Being true to perform classic Elvis concert and studio material, Witt also includes a sprinkling of Presley's gospel selections - reflecting a love of faith-based renditions that Tony also shares with Elvis. The show is at 7:30 PM. Tickets are \$10, \$8 for students and seniors, 60 and over. For more information call the OLT Info Line at (479) 243-0186 or visit www.oltmena.com.

#####

June 6, 2010

'50s-'60s DOO-WOP GROUP, *BLEND*, AT OLT THIS SATURDAY NIGHT

If you love the 1950s and '60s men's "doo-wop" singing group sound, like the music of *Dion and the Belmonts*, *Danny and the Juniors*, and *Jay and the Americans*, to mention just a few, don't miss the show that will take place at the Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT), at 610 Mena St., at 7:30 PM, this Saturday night, June 12!

For one night only, *Blend*, a nationally-known, four-man acappella doo-wop group, based in Illinois, and on a national tour, will be appearing at the OLT. This group excites people wherever they go, doing a two-hour show that people of all ages really enjoy, and remember forever. The songs they sing will bring back memories for people who lived in the '50s and '60s, but also for anyone who ever listens to "oldies" on the radio.

Blend delivers 50's and 60's music with a twist of fun! They make very clear in their frivolous act that they love what they do. The quartet consists of Johnathan Estes, Evan Boswell, Andrew Smith, and Eric Rudd. The group was originally was formed at John A. Logan College as a minor project that quickly blossomed into the makings of a successful career for its four members.

"We started in 2005 for a talent show and ended up winning it. From there, we found we had a unique sound. So, we decided to pursue it as a career," said Estes. The real strength of *Blend* lies in their ability to entertain crowds of all ages with their renditions of songs which most everyone has heard at one point or another all while keeping a Christian undertone. On top of their classic doo-wop routine they are also a deeply spiritual group and love to share their gospel music as well.

In 2008, *Blend* appeared as special guests at the Dick Clark American Band Stand Theater in Branson, Missouri and were invited to be regulars, there. They are dedicated to continuing their education as they tour the United States appearing at theaters, festivals, and also singing gospel music in local churches, wherever they perform.

On Saturday, members of the OLT will be selling hot dogs and chili dogs for 25¢ in the parking lot at Atwood's Farm Store from 10 AM to 2 PM. *Blend* will join the OLT crew there, at noon, and perform a few songs for people who are in the area, then.

Tickets for the *Blend* performance at the OLT are \$10 for adults, and eight dollars for students and seniors, 60 and over. Tickets will be available at the OLT box office 45 minutes before they performance. For more information call the OLT information line at 479-243-0186.

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Ouachita Little Theatre

2009 ARKANSAS COMMUNITY THEATER STATE CHAMPION

PO Box 1217
610 Mena St.
Mena, AR. 71953
Info Line: 479-243-0186
www.ouachitalittletheatre.org
info@ouachitalittletheatre.org

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Larry Block 479-243-0812

NEW OLT BOARD AND OFFICERS ELECTED

May 24, 2010 -- MENA, ARKANSAS -- The Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT) held its annual membership meeting on May 11th and new board members and officers were elected, in addition to a review of last year's activities at the theater by outgoing president Judy Kropp, who has served for seven years. She will continue on the Board as Immediate Past President.

Two of three two-year board positions up for election were vacated by retiring board members Kathy David and Tony Habeger. The third position was held by Larry Block, who chose to run for reelection. A slate of eight candidates ran. Block was re-elected, and will be joined on the Board by new members, Renee Alcorn and Bill Hayes.

There were three OLT board officer changes, as well. Judy Kropp, As mentioned, will become Immediate Past President. Eddie Huckaby, who was President before her, will be retiring from the Board. Replacing Kropp will be newly-elected President, Janelle Baldwin. Baldwin has served as Board Secretary for several years.

A newcomer to the board, Liz Kast, was elected as Board Secretary. Other re-elected Board officers were Brad Storey, Vice President, and Theresa Erwin, Treasurer. Board officers are elected annually, while, as mentioned earlier, Board member terms are for two years. The new Board was officially installed at the regular May Board meeting on Tuesday, May 25. For more information about the OLT please call the OLT information line at (479) 243-0186 or visit the OLT website www.oltmna.com.

#####

May 16, 2010

SEVERAL FIRST-TIME ACTS GRACE STAGE AT OLT THIS SATURDAY NIGHT

By

Larry Block

When the Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT) presents the first of its local variety shows, *Saturday Night at the Lyric (SNL)* for 2010, on Saturday, May 22, on stage, at its location at 610 Mena St., there will be several acts that haven't been seen before at this theater. For one thing, the show will have one of the most diverse presentations of talent in a long time. The performers range from the recently formed *Mena Area Community Chorus* to the comedic scientific experiments of *Dr. Dazzle*, played by well-known local scientist, Rich Mountain Community College professor, Dr. Rudi Timmerman.

One of the firsts will be the *Mena Area Community Chorus*, which was only formed a few months ago, and has never performed at the OLT. Another will be a real treat for followers of well-known local country/pop singer, Colgate Country Showdown winner, Lana Gail McDonald, who they are accustomed to seeing sing with recorded background music. Her performance at *SNL* will be the first chance for them to see her all-live-music debut, singing with her new band, *StormRider*.

Kassi Moe, a local beauty pageant winner and singer, who has been recording recently in Nashville, will perform some of her songs in a Mena debut, some of them with Logan Lind, himself a well-known local performer who now attends college in Colorado, back in Mena to perform his original tunes.

SNL audiences have seldom seen dancers in the show, but that will change on Saturday night, as well. *The Zavala Sisters*, Spanish dancers who first showed off their talents in the recent OLT production of *Bye-Bye Birdie*, will be performing for the first time as a solo act in Mena at *SNL*, too.

An additional special feature of this *SNL* will be a tribute to Dan Kinney, Ft. Worth, Texas- and Mena-based blues songwriter, singer, guitarist, who was associated with such concerts as Farm Aid I, performers that include Willie Nelson, and many others. Kinney passed away two weeks ago. This promises to be one of the best *SNLs* ever. For more information call the OLT information line at 479-243-0186 or visit the OLT website, www.oltmena.com

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Ouachita Little Theatre
2009 ARKANSAS COMMUNITY THEATER STATE CHAMPION

PO Box 1217
610 Mena St.
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Info Line: 479-243-0186
www.ouachitalittletheatre.org
info@ouachitalittletheatre.org

MEDIA ALERT

DIVERSE LINEUP TO GRACE OLT STAGE AT *SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE LYRIC*

- WHAT:** Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT) Quarterly musical and talent entertainment review, *Saturday Night at the Lyric (SNL)*, will present one of the most diverse variety of entertainers they have ever offered
- WHEN:** Saturday, May 22, 2010 at 7:30 PM
- WHERE:** Ouachita Little Theatre, 610 Mena St., Mena, AR 71953
- PARTICIPANTS:**
- Mena Area Community Chorus
 - Colgate Country Showdown winner Lana Gail, and her band, StormRider
 - Spanish dancers, The Zavala Sisters
 - *Dr. Dazzle*, (Dr. Rudi Timmerman) an entertaining combination of Mr. Wizard and crazy professor Irwin Corey
 - Singer/songwriter/guitarist, Logan Lind
 - Recording artist, singer Kassi Moe
 - A tribute to bluesman Dan Kinney
- TICKET INFO:** \$5.00 Available at the door 45 minutes before performance

BACKGROUND: The Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT), will present the first of its local variety shows for 2010 on Saturday, May 22, on stage at its location at 610 Mena St., Mena, AR 71953. The show will have one of the most diverse presentations of talent in a long time. The performers range from the recently formed Mena Area Community Chorus to the comedic scientific experiments of *Dr. Dazzle*, played by well-known local scientist, Rich Mountain Community College professor, Dr. Rudi Timmerman.

(MORE)

A real treat for followers of well-known local country/pop singer Lana Gail McDonald, who they are accustomed to seeing sing with recorded background music, will be a chance to see her debut, singing live with her new band, StormRider.

Another well-known performer, Logan Lind who now lives in Colorado, will be back to perform his original tunes, as will Kassi Moe, a local beauty pageant winner and singer who has been recording, recently, in Nashville and may perform some of her songs with Lind.

SNL audiences have seldom seen dancers on the show, but that will change on Saturday night, as well. *The Zavala Sisters*, Spanish dancers who first showed off their talents in the recent OLT production of Bye-Bye Birdie.

An additional special feature of this SNL will be a tribute to Ft.Worth, Texas- and Mena-based blues songwriter, singer, guitarist, who was associated with such concerts as Farm Aid I, and performers that include Willie Nelson, and many others. Kinney passed away two weeks ago. This promises to be one of the best SNLs ever.

**FOR FURTHER
INFORMATION**

CONTACT:

The OLT information line at 479-243-0186 or www.oltmena.com

MEDIA ONLY Larry Block at 479-243-0812 or larry@blockandblock.com

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MEDIA ALERT

JUNIOR OLT'S PLAY *THE HOBBIT* AUDITIONS START SUNDAY

WHAT: Auditions for Junior OLT (JOLT) play *The Hobbit*

WHEN: Sunday, May 16, 2010 from 2-5 PM
Monday - Friday, May 17-21, 2010 from 5-8 PM

WHERE: Ouachita Little Theatre, 610 Mena St. Mena, AR 71953

PARTICIPANTS: Director, Carrie Randolph
Adult Advisor, Eddie Huckaby
Children ages 5-17 (no experience necessary)

BACKGROUND: The Junior Ouachita Little Theatre (JOLT) will be producing and performing it's annual school vacation-time play, based on the story of *The Hobbit*, the famed Middle Earth series by J.R.R. Tolkien. It will be directed by Mena High School graduating senior Carrie Randolph, who most recently worked as backstage assistant on the musical *Bye-Bye Birdie*. She will begin attending Southern Arkansas University this fall. Her Adult Advisor, for this play will be OLT Past President, Eddie Huckaby

Randolph and Huckaby will be casting for plenty of parts for both boys and girls ages 5 to 17. Some of the leads include the Hobbit himself, Bilbo Baggins, the wise old wizard Gandolph, nemesis Thorin Okensheild, a dwarf who leads his own army of dwarves, his grandfather, Thror, Gollum, one of Bilbo's nemesis, the dragon, Smaug, the human, Bard, Bjorn, a man/bear, Elrond, leader of the elves, and the bad guy, Dark Lord Sauron.

In addition to all these lead characters, there are roles for dwarves, elves, trolls, goblins, and wargs, and even humans. These many roles provide opportunity for children who are new to the theater, but would like to have the chance to see if participating in theater is something that will be of interest to them as they grow older.

JOLT is the junior arm of the Ouachita Little Theatre. It operates under the auspices of the OLT Board, but like a theater company of its own, with its own Board of Directors comprised of kids from age 5 to 17. All of the positions relative to the plays, even backstage, technical, and publicity roles are performed by kids. Everyone is welcome, and no prior acting experience is required.

For more information and application form: Call the OLT information line at (479) 243-0186, or visit the OLT website at www.oltmena.com MEDIA ONLY: Larry Block at (479) 243-0812 or larry@blockandblock.com

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May 9, 2010

AUDITIONS FOR JUNIOR OLT'S *THE HOBBIT* START SUNDAY

By

Larry Block

Summer is coming, and that means the Junior Ouachita Little Theatre (JOLT) will be producing and performing it's annual school vacation-time play. This year's play is based on the story of *The Hobbit*, the famed Middle Earth series by J.R.R. Tolkien. It will be directed by Mena High School graduating senior Carrie Randolph, who has been involved in both JOLT and OLT plays all through her school career in Mena. She most recently worked with Mena high school theater arts teacher, Jessica Kropp as backstage assistant on the musical *Bye-Bye Birdie*. She will begin attending Southern Arkansas University this fall.

Dates for open auditions for *The Hobbit* are Sunday, May 16 from 2-5 PM, and Monday, May 17 through Friday, May 21 from 5-8 PM. Randolph and adult Advisor, OLT Past President, Eddie Huckaby, will be casting for *The Hobbit* which has plenty of parts available for both boys and girls ages 5 to 17. Some of the leads include the Hobbit himself, Bilbo Baggins, the wise old wizard Gandolph, nemesis Thorin Okensheild, a dwarf who leads his own army of dwarves, his grandfather, Thror, Gollum, one of Bilbo's nemesis, the dragon, Smaug, the human, Bard, Bjorn, a man/bear, Elrond, leader of the elves, and the bad guy, Dark Lord Sauron.

In addition to all these lead characters, there are roles for dwarves, elves, trolls, goblins, and wargs, and even humans. These many roles provide opportunity for children who are new to the theater, but would like to have the chance to see if participating in theater is something that will be of interest to them as they grow older.

JOLT is the junior arm of the Ouachita Little Theatre and while it operates under the auspices of the OLT Board, it really operates like a theater company of its own, with its own Board of Directors comprised of kids from age 5 to 17 all of the positions relative to the plays. Even backstage, technical, and publicity roles are performed by kids. Everyone is welcome, and no prior acting experience is required. For more information call the OLT information line at (479) 243-0186. Or visit the OLT website at www.oltmena.com.

MEDIA ALERT

OLT OFFERS SUMMER ACTING WORKSHOP FOR KIDS

- WHAT:** the Ouachita Little Theatre is offering a summer workshop for kids 10 to 17, *The Shakespeareance*, provided by a professional acting organization, *TheaterSquared Academy*, of Fayetteville, Arkansas
- WHEN:** July 28 – August 6, 2010 9:30 AM – 3:15 PM
- WHERE:** Ouachita Little Theatre, 610 Mena St., Mena, AR 71953
- PARTICIPANTS:** TheaterSquare Academy faculty
Ouachita Little Theatre volunteers
Polk County students ages 10 - 17
- COST INFO:** \$150.00 per student

BACKGROUND: *TheaterSquared Academy*, of Fayetteville, AR, a professional children's company, will work with the Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT), to provide the opportunity for children ages 10 through 17 to attend a two-week, all-day acting workshop at the OLT's theater. The proposed dates for the workshop are July 28 through August 6, from 9:30 AM to 3:15 PM.

Some of the specific classes the children will attend include set design and construction, improvisation and movement, scene study, stage "combat," and actual rehearsal sessions for the Shakespearean vignettes that will be performed. The students will be trained in two separate groups, one group containing those ages 10 through 13 and the other, 14 to 17.

The \$150 per student fee for the entire workshop is due two weeks in advance of the beginning of the program. In order for the OLT to be able to offer this children's summer acting Academy it will be necessary for at least 27 students to sign up. If there is not enough interest the Academy will not be offered.

Those who are interested in having their child participate in this program, wish to obtain a workshop application, or are seeking more information, should contact the OLT Information line, at (479) 243-0812.

MEDIA ONLY: Larry Block 479-243-0812 or larry@blockandblock.com

#####

May 2, 2010

OLT OFFERS KIDS SUMMER ACTING WORKSHOP

By

Larry Block

The Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT), working with a professional children's acting company, *TheaterSquared Academy*, will be providing the opportunity for children ages 10 through 17 to attend a two-week, all-day acting workshop at the OLT's theater, at 610 Mena Street, in downtown Mena. The proposed dates for the workshop are July 28 through August 6, from 9:30 AM to 3:15 PM.

This is a summer acting workshop for children, called the *Shakespeareance*, presented by this professional theater company that will teach kids much more than acting skills. They will gain self-confidence as they learn how to stand up in front of an audience and project their voices. They will learn teamwork as they become part of a cast, having fun with, learning, and performing parts of Shakespearean plays, modified for a children's program.

Some of the specific classes the children will attend include set design and construction, improvisation and movement, scene study, stage "combat," and actual rehearsal sessions for the Shakespearean vignettes that will be performed. The students will be trained in two separate groups, one group containing those ages 10 through 13 and the other, 14 to 17.

The fee for the entire workshop is \$150 per student. It is due two weeks in advance of the beginning of the program. In order for the OLT to be able to offer this children's summer acting Academy it will be necessary for at least 27 students to sign up. If there is not enough interest the Academy will not be offered.

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Larry Block 243-0812

APRIL 26, 2010 – MENA, ARKANSAS –

LAST THREE OLT PERFORMANCES OF *BYE-BYE BIRDIE* ARE THIS WEEKEND

This weekend, Saturday, May 1 at 7:30 PM, Sunday, May 2 at 2:30 PM, and Monday, May 3 at 7:30 PM, will be the last opportunities for local residents to see this year's Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT) musical, *Bye-Bye Birdie*. It is a lighthearted family oriented play loosely based on the story of Elvis Presley being drafted into the U.S. Army in the late 1950s, with lots of memorable songs, colorful costumes, and an elaborate, ever-changing set.

Bye-Bye Birdie is the story of imaginary rock star Conrad Birdie, featuring Micheal Sterner, preparing to go off to the army. An enterprising musical manager, Albert Peterson played by Mena High School band director Nevada Mills, and his secretary Rosie Alvarez, played by Liz Kast, set up a last kiss from a teenage fan on the Ed Sullivan TV show, with Kim MacAfee, played by Charissa Henderson.

Always a thrill for local audiences, there is a live orchestra in the OLT pit, directed by Judy Kropp, OLT's board president and musical director. A very active backstage crew, dressed in black and constantly moving pieces of the set is directed by Mena High School theater arts teacher, Jessica Kropp. The cast and crew number about 50, and Dr. Lamar Austin, pastor of Grace Bible Church, is a standout in the role of Harry MacAfee, Kim's father. His very accurate imitation of Paul Lynde, well known comedian and actor of the 60s and 70s, who appeared in both the Broadway production and the movie of this story, is hilarious.

Other featured players include Brent Bell as Kim's boyfriend Hugo, Renee Alcorn as Albert's mother, Bill Hayes as the mayor, Teresa Henderson as the mayor's wife, and Shauna Gilbraith as Kim's mother. There is also a Latin dance routine by sisters Lesly and Sasha Zavala. Director Rudi Timmerman has incorporated some excellent technical features including a huge onstage screen that serves a number of purposes, including the live broadcast of the last kiss on the Ed Sullivan show.

Tickets, available at the door are \$10 for adults, eight dollars for students and seniors, 60 and over. Advance tickets are available at Arvest Bank in Mena at \$9 for adults, \$8 for students and seniors. This is a great play for everyone to see, so don't miss the opportunity to attend one of the last three performances.

#####

April 25, 2010

GREAT FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT – BYE-BYE BIRDIE AT THE OLT

By

Larry Block

There are just three performances left of this year's Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT) musical, *Bye-Bye Birdie*. They are on Saturday, May 1, at 7:30 PM, Sunday, May 2 at 2:30 PM, and Monday, May 3 at 7:30 PM. Tickets are \$10 for adults, \$8 for students and seniors, 60 and over. Tickets may be purchased in advance at Arvest Bank in Mena, at \$9 for adults, and \$8 for students and seniors.

This is a great play for the whole family. In the story, loosely based on the real-life Elvis Presley's departure for the U.S. Army in the late 1950s, there is singing and dancing and lots of colorful costumes. There are also some new technical advances which director Rudi Timmerman has built into the play. A new lighting set up, as well as some new audiovisual techniques, you have to see to believe, add to the excitement of this performance.

With a live orchestra in the pit, directed by OLT Board President and Musical Director, Judy Kropp, and a top-flight backstage crew directed by Jessica Kropp, the audience has a chance to experience the same kind of feeling they might if they were attending a live Broadway play. The cast and crew numbers nearly 50, and includes members ranging in age from under age 10 to over 60.

There are lots of songs, some of which have become highly recognizable over the years. Possibly the most recognizable one is "Kids". It is sung by Dr. Lamar Austin, playing Harry MacAfee, Shauna Gilbraith as his wife Doris, Charissa Henderson as his daughter Kim, and Braden Purvis playing Austin's son, Randolph. Along with leads Liz Kast as Rosie Alvarez, and Assistant Director, Nevada Mills as Albert Peterson, Mena High School seniors, Henderson, as the young girl selected to give a goodbye kiss to rock star Conrad Birdie, played by Micheal Sterner, and her boyfriend Hugo Peabody played by Brent Bell, they are the core of singers performing in *Bye-Bye Birdie*.

If I had to pick one particular standout in this talented cast, it might be Austin, who is the pastor of Grace Bible Church. He has chosen, in the role of Harry McAfee, to do a surprisingly accurate imitation of actor/comedian Paul Lynde, who many people will remember from numerous years on TV's *Hollywood Squares*.

Lynde played this part both in the original Broadway performance, in the early 1960s, as well as in the very popular movie. Austin stays in this role for every word he speaks and sings, and not only cracks up the audience in his performance of "Kids", but sometimes cracks up his fellow cast members, who have difficulty in keeping from laughing, when he sings.

(MORE)

Birdie
April 25, 2010
Page 2

As I said, this is a fun play that anyone in the family will thoroughly enjoy. With only three more performances left, there is just time enough to get your tickets and enjoy Bye-Bye Birdie, this year's only Ouachita Little Theatre musical. For more information call 479-243-0186 or visit the OLT website at www.oltmena.com.

#####

ED NOTE: This review appeared in the Mena Star on 4/22/10

BYE-BYE BIRDIE AT OLT TONIGHT MUSICAL FUN FOR WHOLE FAMILY

I got a Bye-Bye “birds eye” view at a dress rehearsal of Ouachita little Theatre (OLT’s) musical for this year, *Bye-Bye Birdie*, earlier this week. The cast, crew and orchestra were working hard at putting last-minute touches on this Rudi Timmerman directed, 1960s, light hearted musical. The play will run tonight, April 22, tomorrow night, April 23, Saturday night April 24, and Sunday, April 25. It will also run next weekend, on Saturday, May 1, Sunday, May 2, and Monday, May 3. All performances are at 7:30 PM except for the to Sunday performances which will be at 2:30 PM.

Many people remember *Bye-Bye Birdie* either from having seen the play, or might more likely the movie, in the 1960s starring Ann Margaret, Dick Van Dyke, and Janet Leigh. The play is loosely based on the story of Elvis Pressley being drafted into the U.S. Army. In *Bye-Bye Birdie* the Elvis-like character is Conrad Birdie, a rock ‘n roll idol. A record promoter, and a self-serving act sets up a farewell for Birdie where a young female fan will get to kiss him goodbye as he sings a song that the promoter wrote. The play takes place in New York City, and in a little town in Ohio, where the teenage girl who wins the contest lives. It is a lighthearted story with lots of memorable songs that people of all ages, including children will both enjoy and find appropriate.

The music, coming from a live orchestra in the pit, directed by OLT president and musical director Judy Kropp, is a thrill to listen to. Anyone who has been to live theater with an orchestra knows how much fun seeing a play with live music can be. On stage, actors and Nevada Mills, and Liz Kast, as the record producer, Albert Peterson and his love interest Rose Alvarez. OLT regular, Renee Alcorn, as Peterson’s ever present, nagging mother is hilarious. The singing voice of Charissa Henderson as the teen who gets to kiss Birdie goodbye is excellent. Her boyfriend Hugo, who was played in the movie by actual teen idol, Bobby Riedel, is portrayed by Mena High School drum major Brent Bell. Conrad Birdie, who, though he is supposed to be a singer, doesn’t get to do that much singing in the play, is played by Micheal Sterner.

Timmerman has assembled a strong support team, in addition to the onstage cast. His assistant director is Mills, costumes are being produced by Kast, and backstage management is under the direction of Mena high school theater arts teacher Jessica Kropp. In collaboration with OLT actor and set designer, Tim Hesse, Timmerman has built both a beautiful and a technically advanced set. Without giving away too much detail, *Bye-Bye Birdie* is worth seeing just to see how these two have created a set that uses the latest, state-of-the-art audiovisual technology, integrated with the acting and singing. I can promise the audience will get a big kick out of the tricks the technical team will provide.

Seats for *Bye-Bye Birdie* are all reserved. Ticket price at the door is \$10 for adults, \$8 for seniors 60 and over, and students. Advance tickets at \$9 for adults, \$8 for students and seniors, are available at Arvest Bank, Mena Branch, at 1608 Highway 71 North.

(MORE)

Bye-Bye Birdie Review
Page 2

There is also a dinner and the theater package for April 22, 23, and 24, at Spinelli's Café, 1411 Highway 71 North, for \$17 per person both the dinner and theater ticket included. Dinner reservations are at 5:30 PM for all performances and include salad, choice of one of three entrées; Chicken Parmesan, Lasagna, or any Spinelli Pasta with any Spinelli Sauce, plus beverage. Those tickets are available only at Arvest bank and Spinelli's Café.

Bye-Bye Birdie is the only musical that will be playing at the Ouachita Little Theatre this year. It is fun for everyone and we recommend it as a great evening's entertainment.

#####

April 18, 2010

MUSICAL *BYE-BYE BIRDIE* DEBUTS THIS THURSDAY AT THE OLT

By

Larry Block

The long-awaited debut of this year's Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT) musical, *Bye-Bye Birdie*, occurs this Thursday night, April 22, at 7:30 PM. The show will run on April 23, and 24, at 7:30 PM, as well as Sunday, April 25, at 2:30 PM. It will run again the following weekend starting Saturday, May 1 at 7:30 PM, Sunday, May 2 at 2:30 PM, and finishing Monday, May 3 at 7:30 PM. The theater's address is 610 Mena St.

All seats are reserved, and can be purchased 45 minutes before performance time for \$10 for adults, and \$8 for students and seniors, 60 and over. Advance ticket sales are available at the Arvest Bank Mena branch at 1608 highway 71 North, for \$9 for adults, \$8 for students and seniors, 60 and over.

There is also a dinner and the theater package available for April 22, 23, and 24, at Spinelli's Café, for \$17 per person. This package includes reserved seats at the play as well as reservations for a complete dinner at Spinelli's at 5:30 PM. Dinner choices include a salad a choice of one of three entrées, Chicken Parmesan, Lasagna, or any Spinelli pasta with any Spinelli sauce, plus beverage. Tickets for this package are only available, in advance, at Arvest Bank, and Spinelli's, at 1411 highway 71 North.

Bye-Bye Birdie is directed by longtime OLT board member and director, Rudi Timmerman, whose assistant director is Mena High School band director, Nevada Mills. Judy Kropp, OLT's board president and musical director, is directing the pit orchestra, while Jessica Kropp, Mena High School's theater arts teacher, is in charge of all backstage activities.

The play features a cast and crew of more than 40 people, with lead roles going to Liz Kast, Mills, Brent Bell, Charissa Henderson, and Micheal Sterner. Kast is also in charge of costumes. As always, Timmerman promises a unique set, built with the assistance of one of OLT's most creative set designers, Tim Hesse, and some new state-of-the-art lighting and special effects techniques.

Bye-Bye Birdie promises to be one of this year's most exciting events for the whole family. This is a great opportunity for people in this community to see the OLT at its best. For more information visit the OLT website, www.oltmena.com or call the OLT information line (479) 243-0186.

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Ouachita Little Theatre

2009 ARKANSAS COMMUNITY THEATER STATE CHAMPION

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info@ouachitalittletheatre.org

MEDIA ALERT

MUSICAL *BYE-BYE BIRDIE* TO OPEN AT OUACHITA LITTLE THEATRE APRIL 22

- WHAT:** 1960s musical, *Bye-Bye Birdie* opens in Mena Arkansas' Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT)
- WHEN:** April 22-24 at 7:30 PM, April 25 at 2:30 PM, May 1 at 7:30 PM
May 2 at 2:30 PM and May 3 at 7:30 PM
- WHERE:** Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT), 610 Mena St., Mena AR 71953
- TICKET INFO:** All seats are reserved. \$10 for adults, \$8 for students and seniors, 60 and over, advance tickets for adults \$9 at Arvest Bank, Mena branch, 1608 highway 71 N., Mena, AR
- “Dinner & the Theater” tickets for April 22, 23, and 24, at Spinelli’s Café, are also available for \$17 at Arvest Bank, Mena Branch, and Spinelli’s Café, 1411 highway 71 N., Mena, AR

BACKGROUND: Beginning on Thursday, April 22, at 7:30 PM, this year’s Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT) musical, *Bye-Bye Birdie*, will debut at the theater at 610 Mena St., in Mena Arkansas. The other dates of performance are Friday, April 23 through Sunday, April 25, and Saturday, May 1 through Monday, May 3. All evening performances are at 7:30 PM and Sunday performances are at 2:30 PM. Tickets are \$10 for adults, and \$8 for students and seniors, 60 and over. Advance tickets are available at Arvest Bank for \$9.00 for adults, \$8 for students and seniors. *Dinner at Spinelli’s Café and the Theater* tickets are also available at Arvest and Spinelli’s for \$17. The dinner reservations are for 5:30 PM each night and the dinner includes salad, a choice of one of three entrees; Chicken Parmesan, Lasagna, or any Pasta and any Sauce, plus beverage.

Bye-Bye Birdie takes place in the late 1950s, when teenagers across America were crazy for the handsome rock star, Conrad Birdie. Albert, a musical act manager has staked his entire financial future on the success of a song he hoped Birdie will sing. When Conrad Birdie is drafted into the Army, Albert decides to stage a “farewell party,” at which one lucky fan will get to kiss Birdie on the Ed Sullivan show, while Birdie performs Albert’s song. The lucky fan chosen is Kim MacAfee, from Sweet Apple, Ohio, a quiet Midwestern town which is turned upside down by the arrival of show business people into their lives. This is a fun play with lots of good music, that is very appropriate for the whole family.

(MORE)

Director Rudi Timmerman has produced many OLT musicals, the most recent, *Fiddler on the Roof*, two years ago. He is constructing a very impressive set with the assistance of another experienced OLT director and set builder, Tim Hesse. His assistant director is Mena High School band director Nevada Mills, and directing the orchestra is Judy Kropp, OLT's musical director, OLT Board president, and librarian at Mena High. Managing things backstage is Jessica Kropp, Mena High's Theater Arts teacher, and Liz Kast making costumes. With this team in place, the audience can expect another exciting annual OLT musical performance.

Timmerman has also assembled an impressive cast of close to 40, plus a crew of over 10. In the leads Timmerman has called upon a combination of experienced OLT performers and newcomers. In the role of Albert is Mills, playing against Kast, as his girlfriend Rosie. Kim, her boyfriend Hugo, and Birdie, are played by Mena High School seniors Charissa Henderson, Brent Bell and Micheal Sterner.

**FOR FURTHER
INFORMATION**

CONTACT: OLT INFO at (479) 243-0186 or visit www.oltmena.com.
MEDIA ONLY: Larry Block: (479) 243-0812, larry@blockandblock.com

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April 11, 2010

OLT PREPARES FOR MUSICAL BYE-BYE BIRDIE

By

Larry Block

In just over a week, this year's Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT) musical, *Bye-Bye Birdie*, will debut at the theater at 610 Mena St. Final stages of preparation for the production are well underway, with the set nearing completion, the actors working overtime on their scenes, and the musicians, who have been rehearsing off-site, filling the large OLT orchestra pit to blend their music with the actors songs. The dates of performance are Thursday, April 22 through Sunday, April 25, and Saturday, May 1 through Monday, May 3. All evening performances are at 7:30 PM and Sunday performances are at 2:30 PM. Tickets are \$10 for adults, and \$8 for students and seniors, 60 and over. Advance tickets are available at Arvest Bank for \$9.00 for adults, \$8 for students and seniors. *Dinner at Spinelli's Café and the Theater* tickets are also available at Arvest and Spinelli's for \$17.

Bye-Bye Birdie takes place in the late 1950s, when teenagers across America were crazy for the handsome rock star, Conrad Birdie. Albert, a musical act manager has staked his entire financial future on the success of a song he hoped Birdie will sing. When Conrad Birdie is drafted into the Army, Albert decides to stage a "farewell party," at which one lucky fan will get to kiss Birdie on the Ed Sullivan show, while Birdie performs Albert's song. The lucky fan chosen is Kim MacAfee, from Sweet Apple, Ohio, a quiet Midwestern town which is turned upside down by the arrival of show business people into their lives. This is a fun play with lots of good music, that is very appropriate for the whole family.

Director Rudi Timmerman, is no stranger to the production of OLT musicals. He has produced many, the most recent, *Fiddler on the Roof*, two years ago. As always, he is constructing a very impressive set with the assistance of another experienced OLT director and set builder, Tim Hesse. His assistant director is Mena High School band director Nevada Mills, and directing the orchestra is Judy Kropp, OLT's musical director, OLT Board president, and librarian at Mena High. Managing things backstage is Jessica Kropp, Mena High's Theater Arts teacher, and also an old hand at OLT, and Liz Kast making costumes. With this team in place, the audience can expect another exciting annual OLT musical performance.

Timmerman has also assembled an impressive cast of close to 40, plus a crew of over 10. In the leads Timmerman has called upon a great combination of experienced OLT performers and newcomers. In the role of Albert is Mills, playing against Kast, as his girlfriend Rosie. Kim, her boyfriend Hugo, and Birdie, are played by Mena High School seniors Charissa Henderson, Brent Bell and Micheal Sterner. Members of the cast will be selling hot dogs and soft drinks for 10¢ each at Atwood's parking lot this Saturday from 10:00 to 2:00 PM. For more information call the OLT at (479) 243-0186 or go to www.oltmena.com.

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MEDIA ALERT

ADVANCE TICKETS FOR *BYE-BYE BIRDIE* AT THE OLT GO ON SALE THIS WEEK

- WHAT:** Advance, reserved tickets to the Ouachita Little Theatre musical, *Bye-Bye Birdie*, go on sale this week
- WHEN:** Starting Tuesday, April 6, and continuing through May 3, 2010
- WHERE:** Arvest Bank, Mena branch, 1608 highway 71 N., Mena, AR 71953, or online at www.oltmena.com. Click on Tickets Page
- TICKET INFO:** \$10 for adults, \$8 for students and seniors (60 and over). Advance tickets, \$9 for adults. Dinner and the Theater at Spinelli's Café on April 22, 23, and 24, \$17. Dinner reservations are for 5:30 PM.

BACKGROUND: Reserved seats for the Ouachita Little Theatre's (OLT) annual musical, *Bye-Bye Birdie*, go on sale, this week. Every seat in the theater will be reserved, whether they are purchased in advance, or at the door. The play will take place on seven days, the 22nd through 25th of April and the 1st through the 3rd of May. To get the best seats, buy them in advance, at the Arvest Bank branch, in Mena, during normal business hours, or online at www.oltmena.com Tickets Page.

Bye-Bye Birdie also makes available a chance to enjoy dinner, in advance of several of the performances, at Spinelli's Café. For \$17 per person on April 22-24 purchasers can enjoy a dinner reservation at Spinelli's at 5:30 PM with plenty of time to eat a complete dinner including beverage, and make it to the theater with a reserved seat for a 7:30 curtain. Spinelli's dinners include a salad, a choice of one of three entrées which are Chicken Parmesan, Lasagna, or any Pasta with any of Spinelli's many sauces, as well as a beverage.

The OLT usually produces four plays per year, in addition to other events. Only one of the four plays per year is a musical and it usually occurs in springtime. Timmerman has directed several of these, the most recent *Fiddler on the Roof*, two years ago. His Assistant Director for this play is Mena High School band director Nevada Mills, who also plays Albert Peterson. The Musical Director is Judy Kropp, OLT's Board President.

In addition to directing musicals, Timmerman is also known for building elaborate sets. *Bye-Bye Birdie* will be no exception. He has enlisted the aid of skilled OLT set builder Tim Hesse, and this musical's set promises to be spectacular.

A team of costumers are already busy sewing and selecting costumes from OLT's huge costume collection, while Kropp has assembled her orchestra and is rehearsing them off-site, from the theater while set construction and rehearsals are taking place. What all this boils down to is the fact that *Bye-Bye Birdie* is going to be a very exciting play and it will be to everyone's advantage who wishes to see it to visit Arvest bank as soon as possible to get their tickets. For more information visit www.oltmena.com or 479-243-0186.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: The OLT info line at (479) 243-0186 or www.oltmena.com

MEDIA ONLY: Larry Block at (479) 243-0812, or larry@blockandblock.com

April 4, 2010

ADVANCE TICKETS GO ON SALE FOR OLT'S BYE-BYE BIRDIE THIS WEEK

By

Larry Block

The long-awaited opportunity to buy reserved seats for the Ouachita Little Theatre's (OLT) annual musical, *Bye-Bye Birdie*, arrives this week. Director Rudi Timmerman has prepared the theater so that every seat purchased will be reserved, whether they are purchased in advance, or at the door. The play will take place on seven days, the 22nd through 25th of April and the 1st through the 3rd of May. In order to get the best seats, those wishing to see the play will probably choose to buy them in advance, at the Arvest Bank branch, in Mena, at 1608 Highway 71 North, during normal business hours.

Tickets at the door for the play are priced at \$10 for adults and \$8 for students and seniors, 60 and over. An additional advantage to purchasing the tickets in advance is that the adult tickets are only \$9, saving the purchaser a dollar per ticket, as well as being able to pick the best seats, before they are sold out.

Bye-Bye Birdie also makes available a chance to enjoy dinner, in advance of several of the performances, at Spinelli's Café. For \$17 per person on April 22-24 purchasers can enjoy a dinner reservation at Spinelli's at 5:30 PM with plenty of time to eat a complete dinner including beverage, and make it to the theater with a reserved seat for a 7:30 curtain. Spinelli's dinners include a salad, a choice of one of three entrées which are Chicken Parmesan, Lasagna, or any Pasta with any of Spinelli's many sauces, as well as a beverage.

The OLT usually produces four plays per year, in addition to other events like *Battle of the Church Bands*, and the quarterly *Saturday Night at the Lyric*, an opportunity for local performers, singers and musicians usually, to expose their talents at the theater. As mentioned earlier, only one of the four plays per year is a musical and it usually occurs in springtime. Timmerman has directed several of these, the most recent *Fiddler on the Roof*, two years ago. His Assistant Director for this play is Mena High School band director Nevada Mills, who also plays Albert Peterson. The Musical Director is Judy Kropp, OLT's Board President.

In addition to directing musicals, Timmerman is also known for building elaborate sets. *Bye-Bye Birdie* will be no exception. He has enlisted the aid of skilled OLT set builder Tim Hesse, and this musical's set promises to be spectacular. A team of costumers are already busy sewing and selecting costumes from OLT's huge costume collection, while Kropp has assembled her orchestra and is rehearsing them off-site, from the theater while set construction and rehearsals are taking place. What all this boils down to is the fact that *Bye-Bye Birdie* is going to be a very exciting play and it will be to everyone's advantage who wishes to see it to visit Arvest bank as soon as possible to get their tickets. For more information visit www.oltmena.com or 479-243-0186.

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March 28, 2010

CAMPBELL STAGES TRIUMPHANT RETURN TO MENA AND THE OLT

By

Larry Block

Last Saturday night and Sunday afternoon, one of the Mena's most popular daughters returned to perform with her band at the Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT). She is Bernice Campbell Hembree, who grew up here as Bernice Campbell. She was best known for performing with the Mena High School Choir, her church choir at St. Agnes, and a number of both OLT and JOLT plays. One of her greatest assets was the range of her singing voice.

Now, approaching 30, Hembree has a four-year-old daughter and lives with her husband in Fayetteville. Happily for everyone involved, she is still singing. In fact, she is the lead in a Folk-Americana, bluegrass-influenced trio, called 3 Penny Acre. Most people don't know what Folk-Americana music is. It turns out that it is very much like bluegrass, except not all of the instruments found in bluegrass bands are included (bluegrass band usually have five musicians). Hembree's trio does not have a banjo player or a violinist. They do have a bass player which is Hembree herself, a guitarist, her husband Bryan, and a multi-talented player of the mandolin, bouzouki, and guitar, Bayard Blain. Bryan Hembree is also the band's booking agent and manager.

In addition to being a fine musician, Blain is also a very well known as an outstanding luthier. Like Folk-Americana music, lots of people also don't know what a luthier does. Luthiers make stringed instruments such as guitars, mandolin, and bouzoukis, so it's not surprising that Blain that not only makes them but also plays them. His work in the manufacture of stringed instruments, especially guitars, is legendary in the world of folk and bluegrass music, and he usually has commissions to custom build instruments, many of them acoustic guitars, though he is presently building two custom ukuleles, up to a year in advance. Not surprising, several of the instruments the band was playing in the shows at the OLT were beautiful pieces made by Blain.

The songs performed by 3 Penny Acre at the OLT were almost all original pieces written by any one of the members or in collaboration by two, or all three of them. Their songs were lively as well as haunting, and the audience was extremely responsive. Both shows ended with the band being brought back on stage after finishing, for encores. Local songwriter/singer/guitarist Richie Owens opened both shows accompanied by percussionist Larry Block. Hembree told the audiences that they would have been here last April, but the tornado caused them to change their plans, and hope to return to play at the OLT again, next year. For information about upcoming OLT events, like the musical *Bye-Bye Birdie* on April 22-25 and May 1-3, visit www.oltmena.com or (479) .243-0186.

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March 21, 2010

**BERNICE CAMPBELL RETURNS TO OLT THIS WEEKEND, RICHIE OWENS OPENS SHOW
By**

Larry Block

A week-and-a-half ago, a sold-out audience at the Ouachita little Theatre (OLT) enjoyed a great evening of musical entertainment provided by the traveling musical show *Blast from the Past*. The show was opened by one of Mena's favorite daughters, Lana McDonald, with her band, *Longbone*. If you attended that show, or even if you missed it, you'll have a chance this weekend to enjoy another great musical experience, one that features a traveling musical road company plus one of Mena's favorite sons. This Saturday at 7:30 PM, and Sunday at 2:30 PM the bluegrass-influenced, folk American trio, *3 Penny Acre* will perform at the OLT in a show that will be opened by Mena's own songwriter/singer guitarist Richie Owens. A little twist on this weekend's performance, though, is that the lead singer in *3 Penny Acre* is *also* someone who hails from Mena, and currently lives in Fayetteville, Bernice Campbell Hembree.

Local guitarist, singer and songwriter Richie Owens will perform a number of songs to "warm the audience up" for *3 Penny Acre*. Owens, with his unique singing style, can be seen here, regularly, at Big Bear Opry. When *3 Penny Acre* steps on the stage, the audience will quickly become aware that the band is greater than the sum of its parts. It is, in fact, a musical collaboration between three up-and-coming songwriters. Listeners to their music will notice the unique blend of songwriting and vocals that form the foundation of this very successful bluegrass-influenced, folk/Americana/ trio. Bernice Campbell grew up here and has performed in numerous local musical events, including OLT plays. On double bass, she is joined in the trio by her husband, guitarist Bryan Hembree, and banjo/mandolin player, Bayard Blaine.

In 2008, a turning point occurred for *3 Penny Acre*. They won the 2008 Walnut Valley Festival (Winfield, Kansas) New Songs competition. Their song "Dig A Little Deeper", from their debut album, was selected from over 680 entries. And the exposure that Festival brought them was not the only success of the band's freshman year. They also played the famed Good Folk House (Fayetteville, Arkansas), Little Rock Riverfest, and several other festivals. In 2009, and the band continued to turn heads. They were selected as an official showcase artist at the 2009 Folk Alliance Conference, voted "Best New Band" at the 2009 Northwest Arkansas Music Awards, opened for Yonder Mountain Stringband and Railroad Earth, and toured an 11 state region.

3 Penny Acre's unique Ozark inspired sound has more than a regional appeal. Listeners in all corners will appreciate their attention to lyrics, harmony, and carefully crafted acoustic arrangements. Many will appreciate their fresh interpretation of mountain music/bluegrass/folk music and will quickly identify with their "Arkansas sound" as distinct, yet universally appealing. To learn more about *3 Penny Acre* visit www.3pennyacre.com For more information contact the OLT info line (479) 243-0186 or visit www.oltmena.com.

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Ouachita Little Theatre

2009 ARKANSAS COMMUNITY THEATER STATE CHAMPION

PO Box 1217
610 Mena St.
Mena, AR. 71953
Info Line: 479-243-0186
www.ouachitalittletheatre.org
info@ouachitalittletheatre.org

MEDIA ALERT

RICHIE OWENS TO OPEN SHOW FOR BERNICE CAMPBELL AT OLT ON 27TH & 28TH

- WHAT:** Popular local guitarist and singer/songwriter, Richie Owens, will open the OLT show for well-known former Mena resident, singer/bassist, Bernice Campbell Hembree, and her Bluegrass-influenced, Folk-Americana trio, *3 Penny Acre*
- WHEN:** Saturday, March 27, 2010, at 7:30 PM and Sunday, March 28, 2010, at 2:30 PM
- WHERE:** Ouachita Little Theatre, 610 Mena, St. Mena, AR 71953
- PARTICIPANTS:** *3 Penny Acre* with singer/ songwriter/musicians, Bernice Campbell Hembree, Bryan Hembree, and Bayard Blaine, and Richie Owens
- TICKET INFO:** \$10.00, children 6 and under, free. Tickets available at the theater 45 minutes before performances

BACKGROUND: When *3 Penny Acre* takes the stage on Saturday and Sunday, the audience will quickly become aware that the band is greater than the sum of its parts. It is, in fact, a musical collaboration between three up-and-coming songwriters. Listeners to their music will notice the unique blend of songwriting and vocals that form the foundation of this very successful bluegrass influenced, folk/Americana/ trio. Mena residents will recognize Bernice Campbell, who grew up here and has performed in numerous local musical events, including OLT plays. On double bass, she is joined in the trio by her husband, guitarist Bryan Hembree, and banjo/mandolin player, Bayard Blaine. Opening the show for *3 Penny Acre* is very popular local guitarist, singer and songwriter Richie Owens who will perform a number of songs to “warm the audience up” for *3 Penny Acre*.

In 2008, a turning point occurred for *3 Penny Acre*. They won the 2008 Walnut Valley Festival (Winfield, Kansas) New Songs competition. Their song “Dig A Little Deeper”, from their debut album, was selected from over 680 entries. And the exposure that Festival brought them was not the only success of the band’s freshman year.

(MORE)

They also played the famed Good Folk House (Fayetteville, Arkansas), Little Rock Riverfest, Mulberry Mountain Festival, and the 61st Ozark Folk Festival. In 2009, and the band continued to turn heads. They were selected as an official showcase artist at the 2009 Folk Alliance Conference, voted "Best New Band" at the 2009 Northwest Arkansas Music Awards, opened for Yonder Mountain Stringband and Railroad Earth, and toured an 11 state region.

In addition, band member Bayard Blain continues to be the luthier of choice (Bayard Guitars) for a growing number of professional folk musicians including Ezra Idlet (Trout Fishing in America), Johnsmith, Kelly Mulhollan (Still on the Hill), Jonathan Byrd, David Glaser, Johann Wagner, Noah Earle, and many more.

3 Penny Acre's unique Ozark inspired sound has more than a regional appeal. Listeners in all corners will appreciate their attention to lyrics, harmony, and carefully crafted acoustic arrangements. Many will appreciate their fresh interpretation of mountain music/bluegrass/folk music and will quickly identify with their "Arkansas sound" as distinct, yet universally appealing. To learn more about 3 Penny Acre visit www.3pennyacre.com

For further information contact: The OLT info line (479) 243-0186 or www.oltmena.com

MEDIA ONLY: Larry Block (479) 243-0812 or larry@blockandblock.com

#####

March 14, 2010

OLT BALANCES PLAY PREPARATION WITH WEEKEND MUSICAL EVENTS

Last Saturday night, when the energetic group of young people, the traveling company called *Blast from the Past* took the stage at the Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT), and put on a show that thrilled the sold-out audience, they appeared to be working in front of a well-planned set that was designed for them. The truth of the matter is that they made the best of an OLT set under construction for the OLT's next major play, the musical *Bye-Bye Birdie*.

This is a busy time of year for the OLT with completion of *Two One-Act Plays* just a couple of weeks ago, and *Bye-Bye Birdie* starting in late April. Large plays like *Birdie*, a musical with a cast and crew of about 50 people, take a long time to prepare, both from the perspective of rehearsals and building a major set. Director Rudi Timmerman and one of OLT's premier set builders, Tim Hesse, began working on the set literally the minute the One-Act Plays were completed.

At the same time the OLT had booked two excellent musical reviews by traveling companies. *Blast from the Past*, whose show was opened by very popular country/pop singer, Lana McDonald, and her band, Longbone, last Saturday night was the first, and the Fayetteville-based bluegrass group, featuring former Mena resident, Bernice Campbell Hembree, *Three Penny Acre*, will be performing on Saturday and Sunday, the 27th and 28th of March.

When *Blast from the Past* arrived Saturday afternoon to prepare for their show, they found that the partially constructed *Bye-Bye Birdie* set had two steel risers, about 8 feet tall. They draped them with black curtains and used them as platforms from which to perform. They also found a rear projection screen that had been constructed on wheels, which they turned into a rolling "magic box" that they used for one of their comedy skits. They also utilized stools and chairs they found backstage, as part of their set, as well. Extra blackout curtains were hung in various places on the stage that enabled them to make quick clothing changes and entrances and exits.

By the time the *Three Penny Acre* arrives for their show in a week and a half, the *Bye-Bye Birdie* set will have progressed even further. Luckily for the bluegrass group, there are only three members, and no clothing changes required. So, however far along the set is progressing by that time, they will probably be centered in the middle of the stage under a spotlight. For more information about the *Three Penny Acre* concerts, *Bye-Bye Birdie*, or other OLT activities, please visit the OLT website at www.oltmena.com or call the OLT information line at (479) 243-0186.

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March 7, 2010

LANA MCDONALD TO OPEN FOR *BLAST FROM THE PAST* AT OLT THIS SATURDAY
By

Larry Block

When *Blast from the Past*, the traveling country/pop group that features the greatest hits of the '50s through the '70s, appears this coming Saturday, March 13, 2010 at 7:30 PM at the Ouachita Little Theatre, 610 Mena St., well known local singer, known as Mena's country sweetheart, and winner of the Colgate country singing contest, Lana Gail McDonald, and her band, *Longbone*, will be the opening act. Tickets are \$10 for adults, \$8 for students over eight years of age, and seniors 60 and over. Children under eight are admitted free.

Longbone also features Amanda Webb on keyboard and vocals. She is as well known as McDonald, locally, for her gospel singing. The rest of the group are Jay Rogers on rhythm guitar, Gerry Johnson, on bass and Larry Block, percussionist.

Blast from the Past is a traveling road company that performs songs from the 50s through 70s, featuring young entertainers who imitate famous musical performers. They include The Blues Brothers, Johnny Cash, Buddy Holly, Gerry Lee Lewis, Marilyn Monroe, and the Elvis Presley of both the 50s and the 70s.

This group, which is made up of young people from Arkansas and Oklahoma, travels around the mid-South performing at various theaters including a performance later this year at the Rialto Theater in Morrilton, Arkansas, and in Branson, Missouri.

Each of the young performers has a specialty. For example, 70s Elvis Presley is *Blast from the Past* co-manager, Michael Cullipher, who was picked as the number one Elvis impersonator in Oklahoma in a recent contest. Johnny Cash is played by *Blast from the Past* is other co-manager Keith Cole. Together they also interpret the act and music of *Saturday Night Live's* and Hollywood's *The Blues Brothers*.

Some of the other performers in the show include Gerry Page as 50's Elvis, Randy Butler as Buddy Holly, Sandra Sexton as Marilyn Monroe, and comedian Taylor Victory as the imaginary character, Elmer Remele (Elmer spelled backwards). This show promises to be a lot of fun for the whole family.

For more information, contact the OLT information line, (479) 243-0186, or www.oltmena.com.

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Ouachita Little Theatre

2009 ARKANSAS COMMUNITY THEATER STATE CHAMPION

PO Box 1217
610 Mena St.
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Info Line: 479-243-0186
www.ouachitalittletheatre.org
info@ouachitalittletheatre.org

MEDIA ALERT

LANA DONALD TO OPEN FOR *BLAST FROM THE PAST* AT OLT

- WHAT:** Well known local country/pop singer Lana Gail McDonald and her band, *Longbone*, will be the opening act for the traveling country pop group, *Blast from the Past*, featuring the greatest hits of the '50s through the '70s
- WHEN:** Saturday, March 13, 2010 at 7:30 PM
- WHERE:** Ouachita Little Theatre, 610 Mena St., Mena, AR 71953
- PARTICIPANTS:** *Longbone*, featuring Lana McDonald and Amanda Webb
Road-show company of *Blast from the Past*
- TICKET INFO:** \$10 for adults, \$8 for students over eight years of age, and seniors 60 and over. Children under eight admitted FREE

BACKGROUND: A local favorite, known as Mena's country sweetheart, and winner of the Colgate country singing contest, Lana Gail McDonald, who is featured in the country, rock, and blues band, *Longbone*, will open the Saturday, March 13 show for the traveling country/rock performance group. Also featured on keyboards and vocals, will be popular local gospel singer Amanda Webb. Lana, Amanda, and the band will perform as the warm-up band at the beginning of the highly-entertaining *Blast from the Past* show.

Blast from the Past is a traveling road company that performs songs from the 50s through 70s, featuring young entertainers who imitate famous musical performers. They include The Blues Brothers, Johnny Cash, Buddy Holly, Gerry Lee Lewis, Marilyn Monroe, and the Elvis Presley of both the 50s and the 70s.

(MORE)

This group, which is made up of young people from Arkansas and Oklahoma, travels around the mid-South performing at various theaters including a performance later this year at the Rialto Theater in Morrilton, Arkansas, and in Branson, Missouri.

Each of the young performers has a specialty. For example, 70s Elvis Presley is Michael Cullipher, who was picked as the number one Elvis impersonator in Oklahoma in a recent contest. Johnny Cash is played by *Blast from the Past* co-manager Keith Cole. Together they also interpret the act and music of *Saturday Night Live's* and Hollywood's *The Blues Brothers*.

Some of the other performers in the show include Gerry Page as 50's Elvis, Randy Butler as Buddy Holly, Sandra Sexton as Marilyn Monroe, and comedian Taylor Victory as the imaginary character, Elmer Remele (Elmer spelled backwards).

For more information: contact the OLT information line, (479) 243-0186, or visit www.oltmena.com.

MEDIA ONLY: Larry Block at (479) 243-0812 or larry@blockandblock.com.

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February 28, 2010

OLT NAMES CAST FOR SPRING MUSICAL BYE-BYE BIRDIE

By

Larry Block

Fifty must be a magic number because that is how many people Ouachita Little Theatre's (OLT) Rudy Timmerman, the director of the upcoming spring musical *Bye-Bye Birdie* picked to be in the cast and crew of his next play. The play will be performed from April 22-25 and April 30- May 1-3 at the Ouachita Little Theatre, 610 Mena St. Rehearsals began this week and will continue every Monday, Tuesday and Thursday, until just before the play begins.

Bye-Bye Birdie, a very successful play on both Broadway and in London, which is now in revival on Broadway, was written in 1960 by Mitchell Stewart. It is a satirical musical romantic comedy loosely based on the story of Elvis Presley being inducted into the US Army in 1958.

Timmerman is supported on this play by Assistant Director Nevada Mills, and Musical Director, OLT's board president, Judy Kropp. Mills, who is Mena High School's band director, will be very busy on this play. In addition to being assistant director, he is also playing the lead role of Albert Peterson, as well as filling the role of choreographer.

Other people in key roles include Liz Kast as Peterson's romantic interest Rosie Alvarez, and Renee Alcorn as Mae Peterson, Albert's mother. Conrad Birdie, the rock singer who is going away to the Army is played by Michael Sterner. Kim MacAfee, the young girl picked to give Birdie a farewell kiss, in a big publicity stunt, will be played by two Mena high school students, one each weekend the play runs. They are Charissa Henderson and Claudia Smithhart, who people may remember for having played the lead in OLT's recent play, *Barefoot in the Park*. Brent Bell, Mena High School's drum major, will play Hugo Peabody, the jealous boyfriend of Kim.

Ursula Merkle, Kim's best friend is also a part that will be shared by two actresses, one each weekend. They are Kimmi Hanners and Shelby Baker, and Shauna Gilbraith and Lamar Austin will play the parts of Kim's parents, along with Brandon Purvis as Kim's brother Randolph, and Katie Lance as another one of Kim's friends, Gloria Rasputin.

Tickets for *Bye-Bye Birdie* will be \$10 for adults, \$8 for students and seniors, 60 and over. Advance tickets will be available at Arvest Bank, two weeks before the performance, as will dinner tickets for a Dinner and the Theater package including the play and dinner at Spinelli's Café. For more information consult the OLT website www.oltmena.com or call the OLT information line (479) 243-0186.

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February 21, 2010

VOLUNTEERS MAKE THE OUACHITA LITTLE THEATRE WORK

By

Larry Block

Have you ever noticed the road signs along Highway 71 that tell about upcoming plays or other events at the Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT)? How about the big painted signs in front of the theater itself? Ever wonder how they come to be? It isn't magic. Those signs are hand-painted by OLT volunteers.

For example, the road signs were not only painted but were created by Tom Baldwin. Tom is the husband of Janelle Baldwin, a regular actress and director in the OLT. He often helps out with building and painting sets for upcoming plays, though he seldom appears in them. A little over a year ago he undertook to construct four signs that could be placed at various locations around Mena to tell about upcoming plays or events. With the help of Southwest Artist, Ruby K. Manis, the actual words that appear on the sign, permanently, were constructed. Baldwin built the signs so there is a little section in each where a temporary insert tells about the current coming event and when it will occur.

The big signs that appear on the sidewalk in front of the OLT are usually painted by Delani Moe, one of six local kids in the Moe family that are very involved in every aspect of the theater, from acting to working lights and managing backstage activities. Delani carefully lays out the designs for the signs, including both lettering and art, then projects them onto the sign with an old overhead projector, a technique introduced by OLT board member, actor, director, and professional painter, Brad Storey. She sketches out the words and art and then carefully paints them. At the end of the show she paints over the previous sign, usually with white paint, and then starts over painting the sign for the next show.

Tom and Delani are typical examples of people who volunteer their time for the Ouachita Little Theatre. There are many others. In fact, no one involved in the theater is paid, at all. From the board of directors, to the actors, to the backstage people, to those who design and print the programs at the OLT plays, to the folks who take tickets and sell concessions, the OLT is strictly a volunteer organization.

There are numerous other community theaters in Arkansas, and the OLT had the chance to compete with some of them for the 2009-2010 Arkansas community theater championship, which the OLT won. Some of the OLT competitors were surprised to learn that most of the other theaters against which they competed have paid staff. Usually, these theaters are in bigger Arkansas towns like West Memphis or Little Rock.

Nevertheless, the OLT seems to do fine with just volunteers. Each year at least four major plays are produced as well as quarterly musical performances, and a summer workshop, plus plays by the Junior arm of the OLT, JOLT. Examples are *The Red Lamp*, which just concluded and the upcoming musical by *Bye-Bye Birdie*, which will be performed April 22-25 and May 1-3, 2010.

The OLT is always looking for new volunteers, as well as members who will support the theater, financially. For more information about how you can become a member or volunteer at the OLT call the Information line at (479) 243-0186 or visit the OLT website www.oltmena.com.

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February 14, 2010

ONE-ACT PLAYS START SUNDAY AT THE OLT

By

Larry Block

This coming Sunday, February 21st, at 2:30 PM, The Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT) will join hands with the Mena High School Theater Arts Department (MHS) to produce three days of one-act plays. There will be two plays per performance. *The Red Lamp*, OLT's production directed by Larry Block, will appear at all three performances, and MHS's *A Simple Task* will accompany it on the afternoon of February 21st. Then, on Monday and Tuesday evenings at 7:30 PM *The Red Lamp* will be accompanied by MHS's *Among Friends & Clutter*.

The MHS plays are directed by Jessica Kropp, MHS theater Arts teacher, and feature students in her drama classes. OLT's and JOLT's (the junior arm of OLT) actors and crew come from their large group of adult and younger theater volunteers. In fact, Block's *Red Lamp* assistant director, Logan Sweeten, two of the actors, and several crew members are JOLT members. Between the OLT play and the MHS offerings, the audiences will get to see a great mixture of young and adult actors perform.

The Red Lamp, by Hilliard Booth is a light comedy that revolves around the lighting of a red lamp in the window of a family home to signal several people. The problem is that none of those intending to light the lamp knows the others are planning to do so, too. Many confusing and hilarious things occur when the lamp is lighted.

A Simple Task was written by Alan Haenhel. It is the story of Empie, who has a simple first assignment at her new job: retrieve a box of merchandise for the Boss. But what does she do when the box is blocked by a parade of confusing characters, her Boss keeps changing identities, and her whole career starts to feel absurd?"

Among Friends and Clutter, by Lindsay Price presents a montage of characters that experience the most important relationships in life: friends, family, and love. Starting with seven classmates, the play explores what they imagine their lives will be, and shows what their lives eventually become. They grow, succeed, and sometimes fail.

Tickets, at \$8.00 for adults, and \$5.00 for students and seniors, 60 and over, will be available at the theater box office, 610 Mena Street, 45 minutes before each performance. For more information visit the OLT website at www.oltmena.com or call the OLT info line at (479) 243-0186.

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Ouachita Little Theatre

2009 ARKANSAS COMMUNITY THEATER STATE CHAMPION

PO Box 1217
610 Mena St.
Mena, AR. 71953
Info Line: 479-243-0186
www.ouachitalittletheatre.org
info@ouachitalittletheatre.org

MEDIA ALERT

ONE-ACT PLAYS DEBUT AT OUACHITA LITTLE THEATRE IN MENA, AR FEBRUARY 21

- WHAT:** Three one-act plays, two per performance, produced separately by the Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT), and Mena High School Theater Arts Department (MHS), will debut this weekend. The plays are *The Red Lamp* (OLT) and *A Simple Task* (MHS) and *Among Friends & Clutter* (MHS)
- WHEN:** Sunday, February 21, 2010 - 2:30 PM - *The Red Lamp* and *A Simple Task*
Monday and Tuesday February 22 and 23, 2010 - 7:30 PM
The Red Lamp and *Among Friends & Clutter*
- WHERE:** Ouachita Little Theatre, 610 Mena St., Mena, AR 71953
- TICKET INFO:** \$8.00 for adults, \$5.00 for students and seniors (60 and over) available at the door 45 minutes before performances

BACKGROUND: The Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT) has joined hands with the Mena High School Theater Arts Department (MHS) to produce three days of one-act plays. There will be two plays per performance. *The Red Lamp*, OLT's production directed by Larry Block, will appear at all three performances, and MHS's *A Simple Task* on Sunday, February 21, only, at 2:30 PM. MHS's *Among Friends & Clutter* will be produced with *The Red Lamp* on Monday and Tuesday, February 22-23, at 7:30 PM. The MHS plays are directed by Jessica Kropp, MHS theater Arts teacher.

The Red Lamp, by Hilliard Booth is a light comedy that revolves around the lighting of a red lamp in the window of a family home to signal several people. The problem is that none of those intending to light the lamp knows the others are planning to do so, too. Many confusing and hilarious things occur when the lamp is lit.

A Simple Task was written by Alan Haenhel. It is the story of Empie, who has a simple first assignment at her new job: Retrieve a box of merchandise for the Boss. But what does she do when the box is blocked by a parade of confusing characters, her Boss keeps changing identities, and her whole career starts to feel absurd?"

Among Friends and Clutter, by Lindsay Price presents a montage of characters who experience the most important relationships in life: friends, family, and love. Starting with seven classmates, the play explores what they imagine their lives will be, and shows what their lives eventually become. They grow, succeed, and sometimes fail.

For More Information: OLT Info line (479) 243-0186 www.oltmena.com MEDIA ONLY (479)243-0812

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Ouachita Little Theatre
2009 ARKANSAS COMMUNITY THEATER STATE CHAMPION

PO Box 1217
610 Mena St.
Mena, AR. 71953
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www.ouachitalittletheatre.org
info@ouachitalittletheatre.org

MEDIA ALERT

OLT HOLDS OPEN AUDITIONS FOR MUSICAL *BYE-BYE-BIRDIE*

- WHAT:** Open auditions for acting, singing, dancing, musicians, and backstage crew parts in the 1960's musical *Bye-Bye-Birdie* to be performed April 22-25 and May 1-3, 2010 at the Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT)
- WHEN:** Tuesday -Thursday, February 16-18 - 6:00-9:00 PM
Saturday, February 20 from noon to 5:00 PM
- WHERE:** Rich Mountain Community College Lecture Hall
1100 College Drive
Mena, AR 71953
- PARTICIPANTS:** Director, Rudi Timmerman
Asst. Director, Nevada Mills
Musical Director, Judy Kropp
Anyone wishing to audition

BACKGROUND: *Bye-Bye Birdie*, a very successful play on both Broadway and in London, was written in 1960 by Mitchell Stewart. It is a satirical romantic comedy loosely based on the story of Elvis Presley being inducted into the US Army in 1958. There are a number of parts for actors, singers and dancers in variety of age groups plus for members of the chorus and orchestra. It has been revived and is actually on Broadway in New York City at this time.

Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT) will be holding auditions for the April/May OLT musical *Bye-Bye-Birdie* on Tuesday through Thursday, February 16 - 18 from 6:00 to 9:00 PM, and on Saturday, February 20 from Noon to 5:00 PM at Rich Mountain Community College in the lecture hall.

Auditions will be video-taped. Candidates for major rolls should be prepared to sing a solo song of their choosing. All candidates will be asked to read a portion of the script. Candidates auditioning for minor rolls will be tested for vocal range only. Results will be announced by 4 pm on Monday, Feb 22.

The play will be performed on April 22 - 25 and May 1 - 3, 2010 at the OLT at 610 Mena Street.

FOR DETAILS/INFORMATION CONTACT: Rudi Timmerman (479) 394-7622 ext. 1345
Or www.oltmena.com (Auditions page)

MEDIA ONLY: Larry Block (479) 243-0812 larry@blockandblock.com

February 7, 2010

OLT TO HOLD AUDITIONS FOR BYE-BYE-BIRDIE

Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT) play director, Rudi Timmerman, assistant director, Nevada Mills, and musical director Judy Kropp, will be holding auditions for the April/May OLT musical *Bye-Bye-Birdie* on Tuesday through Thursday, February 16 - 18 from 6:00 to 9 :00 PM, and on Saturday, February 20 from Noon to 5:00 PM at Rich Mountain Community College in the lecture hall.

Auditions will be video-taped. Candidates for major rolls should be prepared to sing a solo song of their choosing. All candidates will be asked to read a portion of the script. Candidates auditioning for minor rolls will be tested for vocal range only. Results will be announced by 4 pm on Monday, Feb 22.

The play will be performed on April 22 - 25 and May 1 - 3, 2010 at the OLT at 610 Mena Street. OLT produces one musical per year, and Timmerman and Kropp have collaborated on a number of them before, the latest, *Fiddler on the Roof*, two years ago.

Bye-Bye Birdie, a very successful play on both Broadway and in London, was written in 1960 by Mitchell Stewart. It is a satirical romantic comedy loosely based on the story of Elvis Presley being inducted into the US Army in 1958. There are a number of parts for actors, singers and dancers in variety of age groups plus for members of the chorus and orchestra.

Key parts in addition to a large crew, sound and light technicians, and musicians for which Timmerman and Kropp will be auditioning include:

- Albert Peterson - 30s male, President of Araelou Records
- Rosie Alvarez - Peterson's secretary - principal singer and dancer
- Helen - teenage singer, non speaking
- Teen chorus - 17-20 teens male and female
- Conrad Birdie - Rock Star, about to go to the Army
- Kim MacAfee Very pretty mid-teen girl, quite self-possessed
- Mr. Harry MacAfee - Kim and Randolph's father
- Mrs. Doris MacAfee - Kim and Randolph's mother
- Randolph MacAfee - Kim's Brother
- Mrs. Mae Peterson - Albert's mother, the quintessential "mama"
- Hugo Peabody - Kim's steady boyfriend
- Ursula Merkle - Hyper-enthusiastic friend/neighbor of Kim
- One girl - part of teen chorus with speaking part
- Policeman - In NY train station
- Reporters - 3 of them, In NY & Ohio train station

Those are just some of the many roles this play will have to offer. It is likely that participation, in one form or another, will be available to almost everyone who auditions. For more information call Rudi Timmerman at (479) 394-7622 Ext. 1345.

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January 31, 2010

RENT THE OLT!

By Larry Block

While you probably know about all the plays and other events that take place each year at the Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT), at 610 Mena Street, did you know that it is available to rent for private events, parties, and shows, too? Did you know American Idol winning, country singing star Carrie Underwood, was one of those who did, as she was starting her career? Did you know that the OLT has hundreds of costumes from 30 plus years of performances that are also for rent.

Traditionally the OLT produces four or five plays a year, including one or two by JOLT the junior wing of the theatre. At least one is always a musical, often in spring. This year it will be *Bye-Bye Birdie*. There is one holiday play, this year *The Importance of Being Uncle Roscoe*. The two other plays this year will be *Lost in Yonkers* in October and in February a series of one-act plays including *The Red Lamp*, produced by the OLT, joined by two other one act plays, *A Simple Task* and *Among Friends and Clutter*, produced by the Theater Arts Department of Mena High School. Add three local talent shows called *Saturday Night at the Lyric* and the annual September *Battle of the Church Bands*, and you have the total schedule of the OLT.

That leaves many opportunities for theater rentals. Already this year, the OLT is being rented for a country rock show on March 13; *Three-Penny Acre*, a bluegrass show, on March 27; and *Blend*, an acappella singing concert on June 12. Some people rent the theater to show a movie at a birthday party or for a company meeting. The OLT has that capability, having been a movie theater in the first place. The price for a rental of the theater for up to a whole day, on the day of performance, is \$150.00, and that includes either a required light or sound technician. If the renter has neither of their own, and needs both the price is \$50.00 more. Rehearsal days in the theater building are an additional \$150.00. The OLT is a family-production, community-supported, non-profit organization, and the Board reserves the right to reject rental applications that do not fit with OLT principals.

People are regularly renting costumes, or even parts of costumes, from the OLT for plays of their own, costume parties, reunions and other occasions. Rentals can start for as little as a few dollars for parts of costumes like props or hats, for example, to considerably more for outfits that were custom-made, like the one worn recently by Mae Block as Lady Bracknell in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. It was hand-sewn by costumer Linda Schell and was made from upholstery material, costing over \$100.00 just for the fabric. Dry cleaning the costumes is also included in the rental charge.

So, the next time you are looking for a way to kick-off the release of your first country CD, or need to look like a teeny-bopper for your 25th class reunion, please keep the OLT in mind as a rental source, call the OLT information line at (479) 243-0812 or visit the OLT website www.oltmena.com. It worked for Carrie Underwood! It could work for you!

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January 24, 2010

JOIN THE OLT!

By

Larry Block

Do you know that *your* community theater, the Ouachita Little Theatre, (OLT), is the 2009-2010 Arkansas community theater champion? It's true! Last March a team from the OLT competed against theaters from bigger Arkansas cities, in the American Association of Community Theaters (AACT) Arkansas Festival, with a one-hour self-modification of the play that had been performed here the month before, Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and brought home the 2009-2010 state championship! When, less than a month later, Mena was devastated by the April 9th tornado, the championship the OLT brought to this tough little town, was a beacon of pride in an otherwise bleak world. And it was all done by local people, actors, costumer, set designer, backstage crew, and director - all volunteers.

The secret to the success of the OLT *is* that it's all about volunteering and getting involved. There are several ways, too. For example, you can join the OLT acting, backstage, ticket taking and concessions corps of OLT or its junior arm, JOLT, for kids from kindergarten through high school. No experience is necessary. Just last October the leading role in *Barefoot in the Park*, an adult OLT play was played terrifically, by first time actress, 16-year-old Claudia Smithart.

Auditions are always open and whenever possible, everyone who tries out is either offered an acting part or one on the backstage crew, like prop-master. Auditions are announced publicly and via messages sent specifically to OLT members. The next play there will be auditions for will be the musical, *Bye-Bye Birdie*, in February. Plays and other activities this year include *Two-One Act Plays* from February 21-23, *Bye-By Birdie* in April, the *Summer Actors Workshop* in July/August, *Battle of the Church Bands* in September, *Lost in Yonkers* in October, and the *Importance of Being Uncle Roscoe* at Christmastime, plus *Saturday Night at the Lyric*, quarterly concerts featuring local entertainers.

Another way to become a part of the excitement at OLT is to become a supporting business, family, or individual member. Individual memberships start as low as \$25.00 per year, and go up to several thousand dollars for corporate sponsors and individual sponsors who receive special benefits including free tickets, multiple voting rights at board elections, and free advertising in playbill programs at OLT. The OLT provides a website www.oltmena.com, weekly newspaper articles and a periodic newsletter for members only. But the best part of membership in the OLT is simply belonging to one of the great sources of Polk County pride and a lot of camaraderie and fun! For more information about becoming a part of OLT, visit [www.oltmena](http://www.oltmena.com) and click on membership, or call the OLT Information Line (479) 243-0812.

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January 17, 2010

OLT AND MHS NAME ONE-ACT PLAY CASTS

By

Larry Block

The directors from the Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT) and Mena High School (MHS) Theater Arts Departments have named the casts for the One Act Plays to take place at the OLT, at 610 Mena Street, from February 21 through 23. On each of those days the OLT will present *The Red Lamp*, by Hilliard Booth. On February 21st MHS will also present *Simple Task* by Alan Haenhel. On February 22 and 23 in addition to *The Red Lamp*, MHS will present *Among Friends and Clutter* by Lindsay Price. OLT Board member, Larry Block, will direct *The Red Lamp* and Jessica Kropp, Theater Arts teacher at MHS will direct the two MHS plays.

Times for the shows are 2:30 PM on Sunday, February 21, and 7:30 PM on Monday and Tuesday, February 22, and 23. Tickets are \$8.00 for adults and \$5.00 for students and seniors, 60 and over, available at the theater 45 minutes before each performance.

The cast and crew of *The Red Lamp* includes Mae Block as Matilda Deering, Janelle Baldwin as Annie O'Shane, Ethan Moe as Harold Deering, Lauren Bollmeyer as Alice Deering, Scott Wasmer as Bill Worth, and Jefferson Smith as Archie Clark. Assistant director will be Logan Sweeten, assistant to the director is Delani Moe, acting coach is Kasandra Moe, stage manager is Renee Alcorn, sound tech is Gerry Johnson, light techs are Tony Habeger and Mike Moe, costumer is Joyce Ward, and prop-mistress is Jessia Moe.

For *Simple Task*, Kropp has named the following cast and crew: Ralph - Kyle Saulsbury; Guards - Michael Cabello, Jimmy Cook, and Branden Foster; Connie - Alex Null; Peral - Brittany Brown; Empie - Charissa Henderson; Lover - Bin Miller; Lorelee - Tiny Shores; Boss 1 - Lydia Rhodes; Boss 2 - Denisha Walker; Boss 3 - Jessica McDaniel; Boss 4 - Sarah Josey; Boss 5 - Justin Sattler; Boss 6 - Leslie McCourtney; Teacher 1 - Leslie McCourtney; and Teacher 2 - Shelby Borst. The Backstage Crew includes Shelby Maddox (Props Director); Caitlin Wagner (Costume and Make-up Director); and Cody Shores (Assistant Director).

The *Among Friends and Clutter* cast will be Katherine - Emily Ferguson; Icabod - Smith Harrison; Melissa - Shae Nichols; Joanne - Claudia Smithart; Ashley - Anne Beckel; Trevor - Jacob Maechler; Bobby - Jas Williams and TJ Schoeppey. Ensemble roles are played by Kayla Bird, Senia Garcia, Sam Grahn, Carrie Randolph, Brandon Russell, Krystal Saulsbury, and Carrie Wilder. The Assistant Director will be Carrie Randolph. For more information call the OLT information line at (479) 243-0186 or visit the OLT website at www.oltmena.com.

January 10, 2010

OLT UNDERGOING FACELIFT

If you drive or walk by the Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT) at 610 Mena Street, these days, you may notice that the colors of the paint have changed, and that even includes the sidewalk. The OLT the building took a pretty hard hit in the tornado, last April, including broken windows, roof damage, a ruined heating/air-conditioning unit and chunks of the ornate face of the building being knocked off.

The structure itself dates back to the early 1920s when it was the Lyric movie theater. It was bigger than it is today, by about one-third, when the OLT acquired it in the 1980s. However, another tornado, the one in 1993 took away the back section of the building, causing a major re-work of the whole structure, inside and out. For example, there is no backstage area now at all, and the whole stage had to be moved forward, reducing the seat count from close to 300, to its present configuration of 244.

When the building was revamped after the 1993 tornado the front face was repaired and painted a pale blue with darker blue and gray trim, and continued to look pretty good until the tornado last year. A few months ago the OLT Board, headed by Board President, Judy Kropp requested bids fro repainting the building and the lowest bidder was local painting contractor, Brad Storey. Storey is the Vice President of the OLT, and the Board suspected his winning the lowest bid reflected his desire to see the building with a great new paint job, less than it did his desire to make a lot of money on the job.

A committee picked the new colors, which as you can see from the photo are pale yellow with maroon and cobalt trim. While he was at it Storey and his crew also painted the west side of the building, and the sidewalk in front, gray, as there was a faded version of the Yellow Brick Road that was painted there to promote the performance of *The Wizard of Oz*, in the 2001-02 theater season.

The job is not quite finished. Awnings with colors that match the paint job for the rented business offices on either side of the theater entrance are on order, as are glass "Coming Attractions" poster cases to be attached to the building, just outside the lobby. The next time you are passing the OLT, we hope you'll take a look at our new look and that you'll attend some of 2010's productions. For more information call the OLT Information line (479) 243-0186, or visit the website www.oltmena.com.

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January 3, 2010

OLT TO HOLD AUDITIONS FOR ONE-ACT PLAY *THE RED LAMP*

By

Larry Block

The Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT) will hold open auditions for the one-act play, *The Red Lamp*, this Saturday - January 9, from 9:00AM to Noon, next Tuesday and Thursday - January 12 and 14, 2010, from 6 to 9 PM, at the theater, located at 610 Mena Street, in Mena.

The Red Lamp, to be produced by the OLT, will be one of two one-act plays which will be performed on February 21 – 23. It will share the stage with another one-act play, performed by Jessica Kropp's theater class from Mena High School. Kropp, who will direct this one, is the MHS theater arts teacher, and will select a play shortly, based, in part, on the composition of the class.

Larry Block will direct *The Red Lamp*. He has been busy at the theater in 2009, having directed *The Importance of Being Earnest*, last February, and *Barefoot in the Park*, in October. This play, a light comedy which was written in 1914 by Hilliard Booth, is about a family in New York in the early 1900s. It revolves around a red lamp that several of the members of the family have told people outside the family they will light in the window as a signal, not knowing others have made the same plan. When the lamp is lit a great deal of confusion ensues, all of it very funny.

Cast members for which Block is auditioning will include:

Matilda Deering - a middle-aged spinster - casting females, ages 55 and above

Harold Deering - her teenage nephew - casting males, ages 16 to 20

Alice Deering - her teenage niece - casting females, ages 16 to 20

Archie Clark - a young attorney, Alice's suitor - casting males, ages 20-32

Bill Worth - a traveling adventurer - casting males, ages 35 - early 50s

Annie O'Shane - the Deering's Irish maid - casting females, ages mid-20s-mid 30s

The auditions are open to anyone who wishes to try out. No previous knowledge of this play or preparation for the auditions is necessary. The cast selection will be announced by Friday, January 15 and rehearsals will begin on Monday, January 18 and take place in the evening on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays from January 18 through the week the play, February 21. For more information about auditions, call Larry Block at (479) 243-0812. For general information about the OLT call (479) 243-0186 or visit the OLT website at www.oltmena.com.

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December 27, 2009

OLT LOOKS FORWARD TO AN EXCITING 2010

By

Larry Block

As the result of the American Association of Community Theaters (AACT) competition system, which is held only every other year, The Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT), which won the Arkansas state championship in 2009, will reign as state champs through 2010.

Several members of the OLT family are already contemplating what they will do to win the championship again in 2011, and what is done in 2010 can be a preparatory step in that direction as one of the plays held in the OLT's theater in the coming year, could be the one they'll take to the competition on spring 2011.

The OLT Play Selection Committee which is headed by OLT past president, Eddie Huckaby was, therefore, extra-diligent in selecting the shows which will go onto the calendar in 2010. In addition to the other special events like the quarterly musical revue, Saturday Night at the Lyric, produced by Jay Rodgers, the Summer Actors Workshop, directed by Tim Hesse, and The Battle of the Church Bands, produced by Larry Block, the following plays and directors have been selected for the 2010 schedule. These dates are still slightly tentative, but probably will end up close to those listed:

February 21-23 - *One-Act Plays* - OLT and Mena HS - Mena High School play directed by Jessica Kropp, OLT play directed by Larry Block

April 23-26 & April 30-May 2 - *Bye-Bye Birdie* - Directed by Rudi Timmermann

October 8-10 & 15-17 - *Lost in Yonkers* - Directed by Janelle Baldwin

December 3-5 & 10-12 - *The Importance of Being Uncle Roscoe* - Directed by Larry Block

The One-Acts are still in the final selection process. As they are each under an hour long, they will receive particular scrutiny by the OLT Play Selection Committee, as for the AACT competition in 2011 a play of less than one hour is what is required, and what is done here in 2010 may be what the OLT team will decide to take to the competition.

The other plays listed are already what the audiences will see next year, and they are good ones. Rudi Timmermann is a superb musical director and *Bye-Bye Birdie*, which has currently been revived and on Broadway promises to be a lot of fun. The urbane Neil Simon comedy *Lost in Yonkers* will be directed by Janelle Baldwin who had a great success this fall as assistant director on Simon's *Barefoot in the Park*.

Larry Block, who directed the state championship winning *The Importance of Being Earnest* in early 2009, will take on directing the holiday spoof of that play in *The Importance of Being Uncle Roscoe*, another show about mistaken identities.

So, it looks like another exciting year of fun, entertaining plays and other events at the OLT for 2010! The Board and volunteers look forward to seeing many members of the Mena and Polk County community at the theater in 2010. For more information call the OLT Information Line at (479) 243-0186 or visit the OLT website at www.oltmena.com.

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December 20, 2009

2009 A GOOD YEAR FOR THE OLT

By

Larry Block

Despite the tornado damage to the roof, front, and heating/air-conditioning unit of the building suffered in April by the Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT) at 610 Mena Street, it was a good year. A full schedule of plays and other performances delivered enough revenue to keep the non-profit in the black, which, while not the primary function of the theater, is vital to its ability to deliver quality entertainment to the community.

The year started out with the production of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* which I directed, in February. It had an outstanding cast, and when we were invited to take it to the 2009-2010 American Association of Community Theatres State Competition in Morrilton, we proudly brought home a win to Mena and Polk County, and are the Arkansas State Community Theater Champions, through 2010. At the competition Linda Schell won Best Costumer; Scott Vacca Best Actor; Becky Fuller, Best Actress; and I won Best Director awards.

The annual OLT musical, *Camelot*, directed by Renee Alcorn, took place in April, in spite of the tornado, which hit during one the rehearsals, trapping about 40 actors and crew in the main auditorium of the building. Thankfully, no one was hurt, and with some temporary repairs, the play, with a large cast, featuring the husband and wife team of Jennifer and Jarod McPherson and Mena High School band director, Nevada Mills, was able to go on to a great success that cheered up a tornado-ravaged community.

At the beginning of September, after a Summer that included the second year of a very active actor's workshop, and the ambitious Junior OLT play, *The Outsiders*, directed by Erik Owens, and featuring Arianna Kelley as Pony Boy, the OLT hosted the praise and worship teams of The Crossing, Dallas Avenue Baptist Church, Grace Bible Church, and Union Mission Fresh Fire Youth in the *Second Annual Battle of the Church Bands*, which played to a delighted, packed theater.

As the post-Summer season began, semi-annual Benson Awards, The OLT's gala version of the Oscars, where outstanding performances were recognized, took place, complete with a red carpet, admiring autograph-hounds, and TV and newspaper reporters interviewing the nominees and winners.

October kicked off the Fall/Winter OLT season with the appearance of number of the members of the award-winning cast of *The Importance of Being Earnest* back, in Neil Simon's romantic comedy, *Barefoot in the Park*, which I again directed, with the invaluable support of Assistant Director Janelle Baldwin. Mae Block, Tim Hesse, Scott Wasmer, and Tom Baldwin were all the comedic foils of the wonderful high school-age leads, Ethan Moe and OLT newcomer, Claudia Smithart in an excellent performance.

This year's final play was December's *The Velveteen Rabbit*, directed by Acorn High School Junior, Logan Sweeten, with Adult Advisors, OLT Board member Brad Storey, and Shea Freeze. The play gave lots of kids a chance to be a part of a play, and Arianna Kelley another featured role, as the Rabbit. While a play primarily for kids, it was complex in nature and the cast did extremely well under Sweeten's direction.

In addition to the plays, workshop and church band concert, there were three Saturday Night at the Lyrics featuring local talent, including the holiday edition, just last weekend, and performances by outside groups that rented the OLT, like Bethel Christian School for its musical, *I'll Be Home for Christmas*. Yes, it was a good year for the OLT and we are looking forward to another one in 2010! For more information call the OLT Information line (479) 243-0186 or visit www.oltmena.com.

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