

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

February 5, 2012

SOUND OF MUSIC RETURNS TO OLT IN SPRING

By

Larry Block

It was the 1992–93 season the last time that the Ouachita little Theatre (OLT) performed the Rodgers and Hammerstein hit musical *The Sound of Music*. Audience attendance was among the largest for any play in the 31 year history of the OLT. At the time it was directed by Rudi Timmerman, and it will come as no surprise to anyone who knows the OLT that it will be directed again this time by him.

The play will be performed on April 27-29 and May 3, 5, and 6 at the OLT Auditorium, 610 Mena St. Open auditions for *The Sound of Music* will be held on Tuesday and Thursday February 21 and 23, from 7 to 9 PM and Saturday, February 25 from 9 AM to Noon in the Lecture Hall at Rich Mountain Community College (RMCC).

This play is so popular, that everyone pretty much knows the story, but for those who don't, this is the story about a novice nun who proves too high-spirited for the religious life, and is dispatched to serve as a governess for the seven children of a widowed naval Captain. Her growing rapport with the youngsters, coupled with her generosity of spirit, gradually captures the heart of the stern Captain and they marry. Upon returning from their honeymoon they discover that Austria has been invaded by the Nazis, who demand the Captain's immediate service in their navy. The family's narrow escape over the mountains to Switzerland on the eve of World War II provides one of the most thrilling and inspirational finales ever presented in the theatre.

Musical Director for this play will be Judy Kropp, who will be an integral part of the audition team at RMCC. In addition to Kropp, Timmerman has already named most of his production team. They include Assistant Director for Artistic Matters, Jeffery Matthews; Assistant Director for Administrative Matters, Ann Glenn; Stage Manager, Jessica Kropp; Costumer, Tim Hesse; Lighting Design, Robby Burt and Chris Masters; Lighting and Sound Techs, Cynthia Richmond and Gerry Johnson; and Publicity, Larry Block.

For more information about the open auditions, call the OLT information line, (479) 243-0186 or visit www.oltmena.com, click on Acting, and retrieve a cast list and a printable audition form.

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January 29, 2012

OLT CONSTRUCTS NEW COSTUME AREA

By

Larry Block

The Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT) was founded in the late 1970s by Leda Benson and a small group of community minded citizens. Almost from the very beginning costumers who volunteered for the OLT were making costumes for the various plays that were produced each year. The average number of plays per year has been three or four, and for all intents and purposes every costume that was ever made is still at the OLT. If you do the math, over the 32 years the OLT has been in existence that means that over 100 plays have been produced and costumes for all the characters have been sewn.

The good news is that a lot of beautiful costumes have been produced. The bad news is the OLT still has pretty much all of them. It had them in an area that was formerly a small official costume room, and in the area where scenery is stored, and the prop room, and the makeup area, and the paint room. It even had them in the little office area that is to the right of the entrance to the OLT. The bottom line is the OLT has a lot of costumes and they were stored wherever there was an inch of space.

Finally, several months ago the OLT board decided something needed to be done to store and protect the best costumes and to cull the ones that are no longer going to have any probable use. Under the direction of OLT Board Vice President and supervisor of the physical space within the OLT, Tim Hesse, a large team of volunteers including lots of board members and actors, as well as community leaders like State Representative Nate Bell, attacked the section of the upstairs of the theater which formerly was a very tight original costume area, tore it down to the bare walls and built new a two-story costume and scenery storage area. Hesse led this effort with help from a lot of people, and in particular, OLT board member T. J. Thompson, and Board President Jay Rodgers.

That project is complete, now. The next phase of the project is the complicated and sometimes tedious job of bringing all the old costumes together sorting them by gender, era, and size, culling out customs that will probably never be used again, and hanging them in the new costume area. This may be a more daunting task than actually building the new costume room. Under the direction of Hesse and long time, now retired OLT costumer, Linda Schell, a new group of volunteers is helping with this sorting project. Completion is targeted for the next few weeks.

Once the costumes are sorted and hung in the new area the theater will have significantly more space available in other parts of the upstairs area to store scenery, props, and possibly even set aside an area to be used for both scene rehearsals and become the home of the projected new OLT Dance Company. For more information call the OLT information line at 479-243-0186.

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January 22, 2012

OLT TAKES ADVENTURES OF LUM 'N' ABNER ON THE ROAD

By

Larry Block

Everyone around here knows that Mena was the hometown of Chester Lauck and Travis Goff, better known as the very successful radio and movie team of Lum and Abner in the 1930s through the 1950s. That is certainly the reason that there is a big Lum and Abner Festival here every June. Most people also know that the Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT) always puts on a live radio show reenactment during the festival.

In 2011 the OLT departed somewhat from the standard procedure of just reading an old Lum and Abner radio script by producing a radio play assembled from several of the old scripts by Larry Block, called it *The Adventures of Lum 'N' Abner; A Return to the Golden Age of Radio*, and performed it with more props, sounds, costumes etc., more like an actual play than just a radio script reading, during the Festival. Block produces and directs the play.

In 2010 the OLT also developed a traveling arm known as *OLT On The Road*, headed by Block and fellow OLT board member Tim Hesse. During that year an ensemble of OLT actors took the very popular Southern play *Steel Magnolias* to venues other than the auditorium at the Ouachita Little Theatre, including the Royal Theater in Benton and on the patio at Spinelli's Italian Café. At the end of 2011 *The Adventures Lum 'N' Abner* also was performed for the members and volunteers of the various arts and historical organizations in Mt. Ida.

Due to continuing interest in this play the *OLT On The Road* will again bring *The Adventures of Lum 'N' Abner* to other theaters in Arkansas, beginning this weekend, on Saturday, January 28 to the Vienna Theater in the heart of downtown Hot Springs. This theater, which seats only 75 people, was constructed in an old building, the only one that survived the massive downtown fire in Hot Springs in 1928, across from the Arlington Hotel. It belongs to Ken Goodman who performed his Broadway Hits show at the OLT twice in 2011.

Based on the assumption that the play will go over well in Hot Springs, it is the intention of Block and Hesse to bring this play to other community theaters around the state in 2012. The cast is made up of a number of OLT regulars that actually surpasses the number of parts in the play. This is an intentional plan that enables a great deal of flexibility with regard to who will perform the play at any given production. Included in the acting ensemble that performs the play are Bill Hayes Scott Jenkins, Jay Rodgers, Tom and Janelle Baldwin, Marilyn Brown, Ray Warner, Ann and Marvin Glenn, Hesse, Jeffery Matthews, T. J. Thompson, Mae Block, and Larry Block as the Announcer. For more information about *OLT On The Road* or other OLT activities visit the OLT website, www.oltmena.com or call 479-243-0186.

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January 15, 2012

A BIG COMMUNITY SUCCESS – *THE OLT GOES DANCING!*

By

Larry Block

What happened the last week at the Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT) is proof that the Mena/Polk County community appreciates a little taste of culture! In what some Board members of the OLT agreed was perhaps a somewhat daring experiment, the committee that puts together the usually one-night-only, quarterly local musical event called *Saturday Night at the Lyric* (SNL), produced a three-performance event that featured dances by local artists, exclusively, on Friday and Saturday evenings and Sunday afternoon, as well as a workshop on Saturday afternoon. Much to everyone's delight, the turnout for this production almost filled the theater for every performance!

The event, brainchild of OLT actress and dancer, Jennifer Ogger; OLT President, Jay Rodgers; and SNL Producer, Larry Block, was called *The OLT Goes Dancing!* and featured both the many students of Vivian Bartow, proprietor of Viviana's Dance Studio, as well as two independent dancers, and a local dance troupe. In what the OLT hopes will become a tradition, the show was sponsored by *Mitchell Computer Services*.

The entire first act was devoted to performers from Viviana's Dance Studio performing over a dozen short dances, ranging from hip-hop to ballet and about everything in between. It featured kids as young as four years old, right up to age 19. Some of the dances included groups of dancers, and there were two solos featuring Viviana's students who will soon be appearing in a competition in Branson Missouri.

The first act concluded with three vigorous Zumba dances led by Bartow, herself, with instructor Toni Pfister, several other dancers who participate at Viviana's Dance Studio, and brave members of the audience who were invited on stage to join in. The second act opened with Ogger very skillfully presenting Irish step dancing. She was followed by Mena High School Senior, and Homecoming Queen, Sasha Zavala, performing two skirt dances from her native Mexico, as well as a belly dance. Her parents who were visiting from Mexico and other members of the audience were delighted with every performance.

The last half-hour of the second act was a beautiful exposition of the various kinds of belly dance performed by local dance company *Danse Du Ventre*, of which Ogger is a part. They performed seven sensational dances, some of which involved solos, duets, and the entire *Danse Du Ventre* dance company.

The OLT Goes Dancing! was not only a great success for the theater itself, but for the whole community. Parents, grandparents and other family members got to see their kids perform on stage, in a real theater, which was a thrill for everyone, and the dancers got to have the experience of an on stage production of which they were a part. Needless to say, this will not be the last event of this kind at the OLT. For more permission about upcoming OLT events, visit www.oltmena.com or call the OLT information line at 479-243-0186.

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January 8, 2012

OLT GOES DANCING! THIS WEEKEND AT OUACHITA LITTLE THEATRE

The first event of the 2012 Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT) season, *The OLT Goes Dancing!* will occur this weekend, January 13-15, on Friday and Saturday at 7:30 PM, and Sunday at 2:30 PM, at the theater's auditorium at 610 Mena St. This is the first in this year's quarterly musical series, known as *Saturday Night at the Lyric* (SNL), and instead of being only one show on a Saturday night it will run for two evenings and an afternoon. There will also be a dance workshop on Saturday from 1:00 to 3:00 PM. The show and workshop has a commercial sponsor, Mitchell Computer Services.

This program will showcase the dancing skills and genres of a large number of local residents, ranging in age from early childhood through adulthood. The show is being produced by the OLT's Board member and SNL producer, Larry Block, and actress and dancer, Jennifer Ogger, in cooperation with Vivian Bartow, owner of Mena's popular dance school, *Viviana's Dance Studio*, who will provide dancers as well as host the workshop at her studio at 305 Dallas Avenue, on Saturday afternoon.

Included in the short dances that will be presented by Bartow's students are *Hip Hop, Fuego, Pause, La Luz, Del Flow, Party Rock, The Prince & The Rock Star, Baby Dolls, I Don't Want To Go To Bed, Dancing In The Street, Wild Child, Seasons, and Dark Days Are Over*, all presented by Bartow's students, including Genesis Barnes, Zion Barnes, Allison Bates, Katie Bates, Audry Bixler, Isa Blankenol, Madison Blankenship, Kallie Bollmeyer, Jaccey Boyd, Shelley Callahan, Faith Chaney, Kylie Cook, Hayden Dixon, Saleen Dixon, Victoria Evens, Abigail Fowler, Jadeline Goodner, Piti Guadalupe, Madison Hernandez, Destiny Hogan, Summer Loar, Stephanie Lua, Katie Mesco, Angelina Moe, Jessie Moe, Tia Moe Ava Norman, Sasha Norman, Stella Norman, Parina Patel, Brooke Pearce, Ranessa Ricker, Harlee Rogers, Lily Rowland, Krystal Saulsbury, Kyle Saulsbury, Gabriel Simms, Lilli Sims, Kaitlyn Titsworth, Makela Vega, Mekenzie Vega, Sophia Weaver, Kady Weiss, Kayleigh Williams, Evan Yeagar. Bartow herself, with her assistant dance instructor, Toni Pfister, will perform the wildly popular Latin exercise dance, Zumba, accompanied by Block, playing Latin percussion instruments.

In addition, Ogger will perform Irish step dances and participate with the belly dance troupe, Danse Du Ventre, performing several belly dances. Members of that group include Gianna St. Grace, Amira Moore, Malaya Vai, Naomh, Amber Rose, and Saorise Roisin. Sasha Zavala, Mena High School's homecoming queen, will perform Spanish Skirt Dances from her native Mexico, as well as a solo belly dance.

Tickets for the show are \$7.00 for adults, \$5.00 for students and seniors, 60 and over, available at the door 45 minutes before each performance, online at www.oltmena.com, and by reservation at the OLT information line 479-243-0186. Tickets for the workshop are eight dollars for an individual and \$10 for two people registering together. Registration for this activity will take place at the studio, and can also be purchased online at the OLT's website.

This will be a wonderful opportunity for everyone in the community to witness the dancing skills of local people, and promises to be a very exciting show. For more information call the OLT information line at 479-243-0186 or visit www.oltmena.com. #####

January 1, 2012

OLT GOES DANCING FIRST LITTLE THEATRE EVENT OF 2012

The comfortable living room set from *The Odd Couple* and *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*, last Fall's plays, is coming down, and the bare, roomy, open stage at the Ouachita Little Theatre (OLT) is getting a new coat of flat black paint, as the OLT prepares for its first performance of 2012, *The OLT Goes Dancing!* on January 13-15, at the Ouachita little Theatre (OLT), 610 Mena St. The Friday and Saturday evening performances at the OLT will take place at 7:30 PM, the Sunday performance at 2:30 PM. In addition to the three shows there will be a dance workshop on Saturday, January 14, from 1:00 to 3:00 PM at Viviana's Dance Studio, 305 Dallas Ave.

The dance shows will present a wide variety of dance genres, including Zumba, jazz, contemporary, kids and creative, ballet, hip-hop, belly dance, Irish step dance and Spanish skirt dance. The show will be produced and hosted by Larry block, OLT's music events producer, and dancer/actress Jennifer Ogger. Heavily involved in the production of the show will be Vivian Bartow, proprietor of Viviana's Dance Studio. She will be presenting many of the genres that will be included in the show.

Along with Sasha Zavala, who will do Spanish folk Skirt Dances, Ogger will present Irish Step Dances to the audience. The Saturday workshop at Viviana's dance studio will concentrate on three dance genres – Zumba, belly dancing, and Irish Step Dance. Both the shows and the workshop are open to anyone who wishes to attend.

This will be a great show for the whole community, and give residents a chance to see the talent of local dancers in an onstage showcase. Tickets for *The OLT Goes Dancing* are \$7.00 for adults, \$5.00 for students, and seniors, 60 and over. They can be purchased at the door, 45 minutes before each performance, and online at www.oltmena.com. Advance reservations may also be made by calling the OLT information line at 479-243-0186. Sign-up for the workshop may be done in advance, as well, at 479-243-0186, or attendees may just show up at Viviana's Dance Studio for the activity.

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December 23, 2011

OLT PLANS BIG YEAR IN 2012

By

Larry Block

The Ouachita little Theatre (OLT) has just wrapped up a very busy 2011, loaded with plays, musical events, and even a biannual awards show. 2012, which is already partially planned, promises to be another banner year for activities at Mena and Polk County's award-winning community theater.

The activities will begin from January 13-15, when *The OLT Goes Dancing*. This will be a musical show devoted to dance - Irish & Spanish folk dances, Latin Zumba, Belly dances, Contemporary, Ballet, and more, produced by Jennifer Ogger & Larry Block. Associated with this event on January 14 at 2:30 PM will also be the *OLT Goes Dancing - WORKSHOP* at Viviana's Dance Studio, at 305 Dallas Avenue.

February 24-27 & March 2-5, 2012 will see the OLT's first play of the year, *School For Scandal*, directed by Theresa Erwin & Eddie Huckaby. This is a modernized version of a 1776 British play about how bad manners and gossip can affect people's lives.

The annual OLT musical will be one that is a perennial delight for everyone, *The Sound of Music*, directed by Rudi Timmerman, on April 27-29 & May 3, 5, & 6, while *Saturday Night at the Lyric (SNL)* on May 19 will provide the community with a live music show presented by local performers.

On June 1 and 2, a Lum and Abner radio show will be performed at the theater, during the annual Lum and Abner Festival in Mena. From June 15-17 & 22-24 the Junior arm of the OLT, JOLT, will present its summer play, yet to be named, followed on September 2 with another *Saturday Night at the Lyric*, and a musical variety show performed live by local artists.

Everyone involved with the OLT, and some members of the community are already excited about the OLT's fall play. It is the original 1922 production of *Dracula*, directed by Larry Block on October 19-21, 26-28 and on October 31, Halloween, when the theater will be appropriately decorated, and an audience costume contest will occur in addition to the last performance of the play.

Fall 2012 will see the final *Saturday Night at the Lyric* on November 24, and on November 31 through December 2 and December 7-9 – the last event of the year, the OLT holiday play, yet to be named, will be performed. Of course, there will be additional musical road shows throughout the calendar, as well as OLT on the road productions, provided to other community theaters around Arkansas. For more information visit the OLT's website, www.oltmena.com, or call the OLT information line at 479-243-0186.

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December 18, 2011

A GOOD FULL YEAR AT THE OLT

By

Larry Block

As the Junior Ouachita Little Theatre (JOLT) play, *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*, ended, and we had a wonderful show last Friday night from Hot Springs' Goodman family, a good, full-year of 2011, concluded. It was filled with a very diverse variety of both plays and musical events, exemplified, perhaps by the four quarterly *Saturday Night at the Lyric* (SNL) shows which included original songs by local songwriters, and all country show, a church band extravaganza, and a blues show.

The year began with the all-original songwriters SNL show on January 15th. On February 12th the W. Somerset Maugham romantic comedy, *Theatre*, better known as *Being Julia*, spent three weekends on the OLT stage. At the same time the OLT took the two-person play, *Kitchen Dance* to the state community theater competition at Eldorado, in an unsuccessful attempt to continue the OLT's two-year championship won in 2009.

On March 26th the first of a significant group of musical roadshows visited the OLT with *A Tribute to Elvis Presley*. On April 9th the second SNL, the all country show, took place, followed quickly by the 2011 musical *The Boyfriend*, which ran for two weekends, starting on April 22nd. The annual OLT membership meeting took place in May, as well, with the election of new board members and Jay Rodgers as President. May 28th saw a return of the *Elvis Presley Tribute Show*. The annual Lum and Abner radio show was replaced, this year, with an original play called *The Adventures of Lum 'N' Abner* which ran on June 3rd and 4th. The show also became this year's OLT on the road production and appeared in December at the theater in Mount Ida, with plans for additional on the road shows in 2012.

On June 11th a very stirring *Stevie Ray Vaughan Tribute Show* visited the OLT. Beginning on June 17th the annual JOLT summer play, *Once Upon a Pandora's Box* began its two-week run. In another excellent musical show, local favorite, Richie Owens and his band *Six Mile Creek* appeared on July 2nd, followed on July 30th by an extremely authentic, live music *Hankerin' for Hank*, the Hank Williams tribute event. On August 20th the third SNL, *The 4th Annual Church Band Extravaganza* took place.

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The Fall OLT season kicked off with the *JOLT Talent Show* on September 10th and the *Mena Community Chorus Country Tribute* concert on September 17th. The biannual *Benson Awards Gala* occurred on October 1st followed on the weekends of October 7th and 14th by the OLT fall play, Neil Simon's *The Odd Couple*. The Gena Roberts country show graced the stage at the OLT on October 28th, and Ken Goodman's first visit to the OLT took place the next weekend on November 5th.

The final SNL of the year, the live blues show took place on November 12th, followed, as mentioned earlier, by both the JOLT holiday play over the weekends of December 2nd and 9th, and the Ken Goodman Family Christmas Show on December 16th. It was a great year for the OLT, and 2012 promises to be just as exciting. For more information about the OLT visit www.oltmena.com or call (479) 243-0186.

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