

Shuler comedy breaks barriers to laughter

By Tim Keller
Special to The Chronicle-News

RATON — When it comes to the screwball fun of the Kaleidoscope Players' production of "Servant of Two Masters," everyone's in on it together.

The author left acres of room for improvisation. The characters — and sometimes the actors themselves — literally step out of the play to talk directly with the audience. Whenever the action stalls for mere exposition, a burlesque saloon girl shows up to hold a sign saying "Exposition."

When a cell phone rings in the audience, the lead character leaves the play to get it, and then the production's stage manager walks on stage to take it, using the audience member's real name in dismay.

And then there's the play itself.

Carlo Goldoni wrote it in 1743 as "commedia dell'arte," the prevailing improvisational comedy of the time — think Marx Brothers, Mel Brooks or Bugs Bunny. But Goldoni extended the format by creating three-dimensional characters with backstories. "Servant of Two Masters" was so successful that it killed "commedia dell'arte."

The revolving plotlines circle around the central character of Truffaldino, the servant played by David Trudeau. Ever hungry, he leaps at a chance to serve a second master in the hope that it will double the number of his meals. "As long as I serve two masters," he reckons, "I'm a two-income family!"

But his choice, of course, fuels the play's madcap confusion and seemingly inextricable predicaments.

Revolving around Truffaldino are two intertwined love stories complicated by mistaken identities and a woman disguised as a man. It can be confusing, but you're having too much fun to grow concerned. And you're not surprised when the play ends with everyone happily hooked up. Even Truffaldino finds love — which, by the way, ends his insatiable hunger.

Trudeau, who plays key roles in all four of this summer's Shuler Theater professional repertory productions, finds every bit of fun available. As for all of the actors, this play gives him more to do with his face and body than anything else on stage this summer. Director Gail Dixon-Willden has pushed the cast to take their expressions and movements to comedic extremes, to the delight of both the audience and the actors themselves.

Catherine Herrick and T.J. Mendez play one pair of star-crossed lovers, but they don't even see each other until the play's end, thanks to the disguise of Herrick's character and the clever timing of Mendez's appearances.

Bethany Hernandez's



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David Trudeau's lead character Truffaldino steps out of the play "Servant of Two Masters" to gawk at the incongruous Muffeleta, played by costume designer Holli McFadden.



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Bethany Hernandez's central character, Clarice, is costumed as a southern belle in this farce set in 1787; she alternates between giddiness and whining, much to the dismay of her father, Rick Trice's Pantalone, and their maid, Brenda Ferri's Smeraldina.

Clarice is in love with Jason Wells' simple-minded Silvio from the opening scene — in fact, they're preparing to marry as the play opens — but complications keep them apart until

the end.

Watching Wells play Silvio is a revelation after his performance as the Scottish hit man Todd in this summer's earlier comedy, "Unnecessary Farce."

It's almost impossible to see the same actor in the two roles, and both performances are highlights of their respective productions. Splayfooted Silvio is big on honor but small on brain-

power.

Clarice's IQ is a good match for Silvio's. She's pretty and pampered and dresses as a southern belle a full century before there was such a thing.

Which makes this a good place to applaud costume designer Holli McFadden, whose work is as big a part of this production's success as any other element. She's costumed all of the summer plays, but this one was obviously an obsessive labor of love. Although she had help from seamstresses Mary Ann Dailey and Mollie Freeman, you can bet McFadden pulled all-nighters creating these comedic period costumes which work beautifully with the characters and with Willden's sets.

As if that wasn't enough, McFadden joins the fun on stage, too: whenever the play's dialog digresses, her character "Muffeleta" appears with a sign saying, "Exposition." Taking the fun over the top, she's enticingly costumed as a burlesque saloon girl, drop dead gorgeous and unimaginably incongruous to anything else on the stage. Cast, characters, and audience all love it.

Brenda Ferri continues her summer run of fun as Smeraldina, the maid who finds love in the end. She gets to break "the fourth wall" and talk directly with the audience more than anyone else, and she does it delightfully with a sparkle and a wink.

Rick Trice is perfect as

Clarice's father, Pantalone, who is understandably confounded as he watches the plot unfold around him.

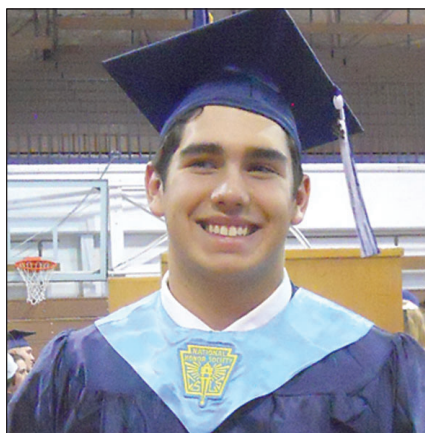
H.M. Burlinson makes his Shuler debut as Dr. Lombardi, father of Silvio, which cannot have been an easy lot in life. Zach Salazar enjoys his roles as a waiter, a porter, and an uncredited actors' line prompter who is a mute.

Shuler summer stock regular Jillian Solano takes a relatively smaller role here as the innkeeper Brighella, although she gets the fun of giving directions that take a character down Second Street to several of Raton's prominent businesses, including two stops at Solano's Boot & Western Wear.

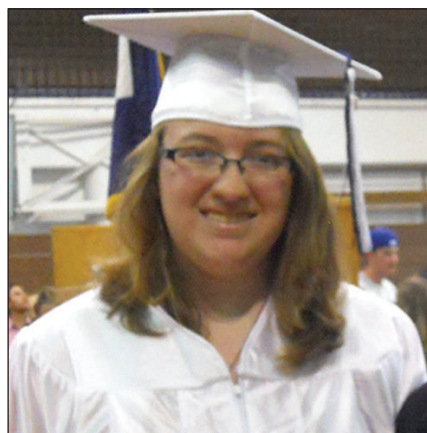
It's just such incongruity that makes "Servant of Two Masters" so much fun. In the cast reception line after Saturday's opening night performance, smiling people were overheard saying that they thought this was the funniest show of the season, which is saying a lot.

"Servant of Two Masters" continues with Shuler Theater performances Thursday and Friday nights at 7:30 p.m. The show closes with performances Saturday, July 28, at 7:30 p.m., and a Sunday matinee July 29 at 2:30 p.m.

General admission tickets are available at the door — adults \$15, seniors \$13, and children \$5. Additional information is available at the Shuler Theater, (575) 445-4746.



NICK MASON



RACHEL HADAWAY

Students get environmental scholarships

The Chronicle-News

Trinidad students Rachel Hadaway and Nick Mason have been awarded the Culebra Range Community Coalition's first two Environmental Scholarships.

The new scholarship program announced by the group is intended to help local graduating seniors who plan to attend college and study in an environmental field.

The scholarship is funded through donations from the Tercio Trinchera Foundation and Cabot family members. Fund raising efforts will also help pay for the scholarship program.

The coalition will accept donations at its Coffee for Causes booth every week at the Trinidad Farmers Market this year as well.

Hadaway and Mason will

study engineering with a focus on working on processes to reduce pollution and waste, conserve natural resources, and reduce potentially negative environmental impacts of activities and operations. They want to protect the world for generations to come.

To donate to the new program or to apply for a scholarship, contact Tom Perry at tomandlindaperry@gmail.com.

World War II veterans to be honored at annual historical society picnic

By Sharon Moe Furl
Special to The Chronicle-News

World War II veterans will be honored as Centennial Citizens and Stonewall will be named 2012 Town of Las Animas County at the Trinidad Historical Society's annual picnic this month.

The historical society's picnic will take place at the A.R. Mitchell Museum on the first floor at noon July 28.

The award presentations will follow the

picnic.

Normally, the annual Centennial Citizen award goes to a person whose family has resided in Las Animas County for at least 100 years and has made a lasting contribution to the community, but this year all World War II veterans who attend the event will be honored as Centennial Citizens.

Also, certificates will be presented to Century Family applicants.

For this award, an application and documentation must be presented proving that the family has resided in Las Animas County for at least 100 years.

The award this year for a community in Las Animas County that is at least 100 years old and has had no published history will go to Stonewall and its surrounding valley.

A booklet with a brief history of the

area has been compiled and will be sold at the picnic. It will also be available at the Loudon-Henritz Archaeology Museum or Hadad's Home Furnishings.

Those who are not members of the Trinidad Historical Society are welcome to attend the picnic but must make reservations by July 18 by calling Mary Ellen Hadad at 719-846-3373 or 719-846-6074.

The cost of the picnic lunch is \$12 per person.