

Veteran actor returns to Shuler for musical comedy

By **Tim Keller**
Special to *The Chronicle-News*

RATON — When the Shuler Theater's professional repertory troupe, the Kaleidoscope Players, mounts the musical comedy "Two by Two" this evening, one of the earliest Kaleidoscope Players will be returning after a long hiatus.

Lifelong professional actor David Ode returns to the Shuler Theater after a recent phone conversation with Shuler Theater impresario Bill Fegan lured him back.

Ode (pronounced O'dee) joins a cast of eight in a retelling of the story of Noah and the ark that is alternately inspirational and hilarious. With music by Richard Rodgers, music direction by Bill Crary, and live piano accompaniment by Carol Simmons, the production gives Ode a rollicked return to the Shuler stage.

When Bill Fegan came to the Shuler Theater in 1963, he created the Kaleidoscope Players for local and touring productions. At the same time, he established artists-in-the-schools programs throughout the region, with visiting actors and directors helping schools to mount their own theater productions.

By 1968, Fegan's schools program was so exemplary



Tim Keller/Special to *The Chronicle-News*

Actor David Ode rejoins the Shuler Theater's Kaleidoscope Players for this week's opening of the musical comedy "Two by Two," a story of Noah and his ark. Ode first performed with the Kaleidoscope Players in 1968.

that he was flown to Honolulu for a week in order to address a national convention of arts educators. After his presentation,

Minnesota's deputy director of education, Dr. Sigurd Ode, approached Fegan at lunch. Deep into their conversation, Fegan's ears

perked up when he learned that Ode had a son who was directing theater productions back home in Minneapolis.

"I flew to Denver," David Ode recalls. "I took a bus from the airport to Raton to meet with Bill, then back to Denver to fly back to close the show I had in Minneapolis. Bill's fall program in the schools was about to start, so I raced back to Raton to join up."

Using Raton and the Shuler Theater as a home base, Ode directed "Lilies of the Field" at Wagon Mound High School, "Low and Behold" at Des Moines School, and others in schools all around north-eastern New Mexico.

"I spent five, six weeks in each town, working with the students in the evenings. I did that for two school years."

Meantime, Fegan was busy in his Shuler office mounting stage productions for the Kaleidoscope Players, which now included David Ode.

"We'd rehearse and open our plays at the Shuler," Ode says, "then take them out on road tours doing one-nighters. We did 'Spoon River,' 'Ladies Versus the Gentlemen' and 'Carnival.' We'd travel in a bus across the South from Texas to the Carolinas, playing theaters all the way out and back.

"When we toured

'Carnival' we had the same bus and driver that carried The Who on their first U.S. tour. That bus inspired The Who's classic rock song, 'Magic Bus,' which was already famous by then so we were pretty excited."

Ode continued to direct shows for Bill Fegan intermittently through the 1970s, but he'd moved on to Denver, working steadily at The Third Eye. He spent years living and working in Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles, where he acted in several movies and TV shows.

He moved back to New Mexico permanently in 1986, settling in Cerrillos, but his acting and directing keep him on the move. The last time he appeared with the Kaleidoscope Players on the Shuler stage was in Dale Wasserman's musical "Shakespeare and the Indians" in 1989.

"The Shuler is one of the best theaters in this country," Ode says. "It's an undersung hero and one of the best-built opera houses in the West. It's competitive with European opera houses and probably better acoustically."

In "Two by Two," Ode plays Noah's eldest son, Shem, whom he describes as "a merchant, not an elder. He has to leave the merchant life behind, but he's the organized one, the provider."

It's a musical comedy, so Ode sings. He laughs about his singing. "I always joke that I sing like an actor." But he says the play's director, Gail Dixon-Willden, tells him that he sounds fine. Drawn deeper, Ode reveals that he was in a high school doo-wop group, The Four Counts, in which he sang bass.

He'll be singing with castmates Adrienne Coleman, Dreyson Solano, Rebecca Clark, Perry Self, Jillian Solano, Desiree Martinez, and, as Noah, Rick Trice.

"Two by Two" opens at the Shuler Theater earlier than usual tonight, at 6 p.m., so the audience and the Kaleidoscope Players can be outside after the performance in time to enjoy Raton's annual city 4th of July fireworks display.

Additional performances of "Two by Two" will be at 7:30 p.m. Friday and July 13 and 20. Sunday matinees will be performed at 2:30 p.m. on July 14 and 21.

The Kaleidoscope Players present five shows in rotation throughout the summer. General admission tickets are \$15 for adults, \$13 seniors, and \$5 children. Books of 10 tickets are available for \$100. Tickets and information are available at the Shuler Theater; (575) 445-4746.



Courtesy Colorado State Extension Service

Las Animas County 4-H members show off the ribbons they won in this year's horse competition at the state convention. From right, Maral Howell (coach), Mikaela Cushing, Anastasia Torres,

Area 4-H members win honors in horse contest at state convention in Fort Collins

The Chronicle-News

Fort Collins was full of 4-H members from across the state last month.

With approximately 400 4-H members attending the state conference, Las Animas County brought a large group with 18 participants.

Those representatives included: Jacob Walter, Craig Lambeth, Todd Arnhold, Kolton Aubuchon, Robert Mantelli, Jacob Torres, Weston McGuire, Jordan Trujillo, Marina Olguin, Shelby Winter, Colleen Iuppa, Jessica Tortorelli, Anastasia Torres,

Mikaela Cushing, Jeana Pedri, Lacey Valdez, Alyssa Pedri and Elizabeth Manfreddi.

All of the members were delegates for District VII and voting members.

The four busy days consisted of agriculture workshops, inspirational speakers, Colorado State University campus tours and fun workshops.

Additionally, Las Animas County participated in the state horse judging contest.

This was the first team to represent Las Animas County in the horse

division in more than two decades.

The team did an excellent job, winning fourth place in halter, sixth team in performance, sixth team in reasons and fifth team overall.

Individual honors were awarded to Torres, sixth high individual overall in reasons.

Elizabeth Manfreddi will be replaced this year as District VII president by Jacob Walter.



Benefit for accident victims planned

Courtesy Mary Ellen Armijo

A benefit dinner will be held for Mandi Armijo and her children, who were injured in an accident. The dinner is July 13 from 4 until 8 p.m. at the El Rancho. Tickets are \$10 for an enchilada or a rigatoni dinner. To purchase tickets contact Mickey at 680-9042 or the El Rancho at 846-9049. Tickets will also be available at the door. There will also be a silent auction. To donate an item for the auction, contact Mickey. An account has also been set up at First National bank for anyone who would like to donate.

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