



SPOTLIGHT

401 North 6th Street

September 9, 2017

www.fslt.org

Dates: Opening Night Gala of FSLT's production of *Making God Laugh* will be September 21. Regular evening performances will be September 22-23 and 27-30. A matinee will be offered on Sunday, September 24.

Times: All evening performances begin at 7:30 p.m. Patrons may be seated after 6:45 p.m. The matinees begin at 2:00 p.m. Patrons may be seated after 1:15 p.m.

Box Office Hours: The box office is open from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 5 to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday, and on Saturdays from 5 to 7 p.m. during the run of the show.

Reservations: Reservations can be made by calling 479-783-2966. Calls will be returned in the order they are received. Reservations will be held until 15 minutes before the show. Gala Tickets \$27. All other shows \$12.

Season Ticket Holders: Regular season ticket patrons are encouraged to call September 9-13 for preferred seating. They can also reserve a General Admission seat for every Season Ticket they have. General Admission reservations will not be filled until September 14.

Reminder: When you call to make a reservation, Press 2.

Making God Laugh

Delivers Every Emotion

“We plan, God laughs.” — Yiddish Proverb

Audiences will experience a sweet, funny, and familiar taste of family life with Fort Smith Little Theatre's next production. Directed by Lora Rice, *Making God Laugh*, follows one typical American family over the course of more than 30 years' worth of holidays. Described as a “dramedy” by author Sean Grennan, the story takes place in four scenes at a family home, approximately 10 years apart, starting in 1980.

“The message of this story is that we all start our journeys into adulthood with dreams, plans, and expectations about the roads we will take. Then life happens. We are moved off course by unexpected bumps in the road, some good and some bad, and we are taken down paths that we could never have imagined,” Rice said.

In the story, Ruthie and Bill (portrayed on stage by Jill Ledbetter and Michael Richardson) are facing life as empty-nesters. Their grown children – a former football star (Richard, played by Cody Bannin), an aspiring actress (Maddie, played by Summer Robinson), and a priest (Thomas, played by John Hall) – all return home, where the audience learns of their plans and dreams as they embark on their adult lives.

As Ruthie and Bill contend with changes of their own, old family rituals are trotted out and ancient tensions flare. As time passes, the family discovers that, despite what we may have in mind, we often arrive at unexpected destinations.

See *Making God Laugh* on page 3





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As early as 1950, First National Bank was supporting FSLT by advertising in our show programs, and through the decades they have continued their generous patronage. Founded in 1872 and still locally owned, First National is here to serve all of your banking needs.

Director's Letter

I caught the "Director bug" about five years ago. I began my search for a play and came across this gem that I immediately loved. I went on to read several more scripts, but something kept drawing me back to this one. It is a wholesome play, uproariously funny at times, yet touching and poignant at others. The time period (80's, 90's, 2000's) coincides with my own adult years, and the many references to long-forgotten styles and cars and sports and news, makes me smile. I loved getting to know these characters and watching their relationships – between siblings, between parents, between children and parents – I daresay most of you watching will recognize someone in these characters.

The message of this story is that we all start our journeys into adulthood with dreams and plans and expectations about the roads we will take. Then life happens. We are moved off course by unexpected bumps in the road, some good and some bad, and we are taken down paths that we could never have imagined. But in the end we realize - that's okay. I hope this makes you smile too.

- Lora Rice, Director

The Secret Garden Extends Beyond Stage

Xuyen and Skip Dangers's appreciation for the theme of healing and hope in the book, *The Secret Garden*, led them to create a secret garden in three other countries and offer a Secret Garden Children's Theatre in Ozark where they live. After first attending FSLT's recent *Secret Garden* production, they attended again with carloads of friends in tow. After the show closed, they hosted cast and crew for lunch and tour of a real-life Secret Garden.



Memorials

Donations in memory of Phanita Williams have been received from the following persons. Our FSLT family appreciates these thoughtful gifts, just as we appreciate the many years that Phanita spent behind the scenes at FSLT.

Gene Nelson
Sandy Humphreys
Bob and Barbara Hartness
Dorothy Boulton
Bob and Betty Goss
Sue Cooley

Wilma McCauley
Claudette Raible
Bobbie Wohlford
Phil and Louise Barling
Donnie Pendergraft

Matt and Julie Ketcham
Laura and Eric Hartness
Jennifer Karber
Deana Hankins
Angela and Bill Covey
Rebecca Yarbrough

Making God Laugh opens September 21

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“My personal experience contributed greatly to my appreciation of the script,” Rice said. “I could certainly relate to the theme of accepting and embracing life’s unexpected turns and detours. You see, I have been onstage or backstage at FSLT in at least one show per year since 2000 – with the exception of 2014 when my own life took an unexpected detour.” In 2014, Rice was diagnosed with H1N1 flu, which led to pneumonia, sepsis and ARDS. For 64 days, she was in an induced coma, dependent on a ventilator for her very breath.

“This prompted an unbelievable outpouring of love, prayers, and support from my family, friends, neighbors, and even strangers,” Rice said. “The doctors prepared my family for the worst, offering little hope that I would ever breathe on my own again. It was indeed a long road, including several months of physical and occupational therapy, and more than a year tethered to an oxygen tank. But God responded to those prayers by healing me and bringing me to a place where I could once again do the things I enjoy. I was able to return to the stage earlier this year and am now sitting in the director’s chair! I certainly never envisioned this detour in my life, but it led me to recognize how

precious life is, and how important are our relationships with one another,” she added.

The play also holds a common thread with Ledbetter, who has been involved in over 25 productions at FSLT, be it acting, costuming, directing, or producing. “Like my character, Ruthie, I am a Catholic and a recent empty-nester. I feel very much in touch with Ruthie, her love of family, and her obsession with everything being perfect.”

Richardson, another familiar face to FSLT patrons, commented that the well-defined characters drew him to auditions. “They are definitely real people dealing with real issues. And this is a great chance to play opposite Jill (Ledbetter) again. We are old friends who have played husband and wife at FSLT numerous times.”

Robinson, playing the couple’s only daughter, said “I loved the family dynamic of this story. The relationships are intense. I love the comedy aspects of it, but it’s also a true drama. You don’t often experience such raw emotions on stage as you do in this play.”

While the well-written script and FSLT veterans bringing the words to life are

enough to make this show something all will want to see, the magic executed backstage will ensure the experience is memorable. Crew members will include: producer, Valerie Valentine; stage manager, Cassie Mikel; set design, Scott Black; props., Tyler Basham; lighting design, Jennie Mathews and Jeremy Marston; tech. board operators, Chuck Howard and Marston; set construction, Black, Marston, and Basham.

Making God Laugh will deliver laughter, joy, anger, and tears. There will be a lot to enjoy, and a lot to ponder as the curtain goes down. Hall, who plays one of the two sons, said it well, “I hope our audience will take away from this show the reminder to talk to your family. Don’t leave anything unsaid.”

The show will be staged at 7:30 p.m. on September 21-23 and 27-30 with a Sunday matinee at 2 p.m. on September 24.

For season ticket patrons, reservations will be accepted beginning Saturday, September 9. General admission reservations will be accepted beginning Thursday, September 14. Just call 479-783-2966, press 2, to reserve your seat for *Making God Laugh*.



New Stage Projector Introduced

Our small stage provides a wonderful intimacy between the audience and the actors. On the flip side, it limits the shows we can offer to those requiring minimal scene changes and sets. However, a new stage projector has significantly broadened our staging options. The use of 8x12 foot projected images, first introduced in *The Secret Garden*, received rave reviews from our patrons who enjoyed the use of photos to help tell the story and set the scenes. This wonderful addition to our theatre was made possible by a generous gift from the **Walton Family Foundation**, and installation that was provided by **Carters Audio Video, Fort Smith**. We are grateful for their support and what this new projection equipment will bring to future productions.

Shout Outs

We can’t say it often or loudly enough – THANK YOU to all these fine folks who recently provided services to FSLT!

- Modern Fence** – fence gate repair
- Annidale Sound** – sound equipment servicing
- Do South Magazine** – advertising
- DBS high school sorority** – facility cleaning
- Home Depot** – set materials
- Marie’s Locks** – keys
- International Paper** – set materials

Fort Smith Little Theatre
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P.O. Box 3752, Fort Smith, AR 72913

www.fslt.org

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From the Top...

Many thanks to Co-Directors Carole Rogers and George Mann and their talented cast and crew of *The Secret Garden* for such a wonderful, uplifting production. A musical requires a longer rehearsal schedule than other shows, plus three additional performances. We appreciate the serious commitment required by everyone involved in this musical and all of our FSLT productions.

Again, too soon, our FSLT family has lost another long-time volunteer and close friend. Phanita Williams began donating her talent and time to FSLT in the 1960s. We enjoyed her support as a volunteer and patron, and her ever-present smile for over 40 years. Her legacy is long and loyal, and she will be missed.

Like the Greek faces of Comedy and Tragedy, we deal with the sadness of loss with the passing of our long-time volunteers and patrons, while we also benefit greatly from a continuing influx of new volunteers and new patrons. This is the strength and simple formula for success for our community theatre. We have lots of dedicated folks willing to work together to present quality, live theatre...and life goes on...

Up next is *Making God Laugh* – the premise being that to make God laugh, present him with a “Life Plan.” Most of us realize that life is what you don’t plan, so we can all relate to this heartwarming story of a family’s nearly 40-year journey dealing with everything that wasn’t in their plan! It’s a wholesome, well-written, “good fun” play. I am delighted to be in the cast of this production, directed by Lora Rice. Come see us!

- Michael Richardson, *President*

Next Up

Auditions for *The Odd Couple* (female version), directed by Eric Wells, will be held at 7 p.m. at the theatre on October 2. Callbacks will be held October 3. The cast calls for 6 females, ages 25-50; and 2 males, ages 30-45. Production dates are November 9-18. For more information, go to fslt.org.

Season Ticket holders are urged to call before September 14 for reservations.