

# Williams Street reimagines 'The Fantasticks'

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The Williams Street Repertory is launching its second season with a new twist on an old favorite.

The theater company presents "The Fantasticks" at the Raue Center for the Arts in Crystal Lake starting Aug. 10 and running to Aug. 26. Performances begin at 8 p.m.

As the longest-running musical in history, "The Fantasticks" has proven itself a classic, but the Williams Street Repertory has put a new spin on the story of two neighboring widowers who conspire to match their children by pretending to feud and forbidding them to associate with each other. As producing director T. Paul Lowry explained, the show has been re-imagined in a circus setting.

"It's a fresh approach to a show that has a long tradition and vision to it," Lowry said. "The audience can expect a new look, something they've never seen before." This includes giving the characters roles typically associated with the circus, such as presenting the story's narrator as the ringmaster.

Another significant change being made to the musical is the addition of more female performers. Lowry said some of the parts traditionally played by men will be recast with women to provide a wider vocal range than a typical production of "The Fantasticks."

Lowry said the inspiration to place the story in a circus setting came to him because he wanted to take a fresh look at the characters. "Without the story, the characters don't exist, because you can't imagine them outside the story," he said, adding that this is a quality he's associated with the character that make up a circus.

"It's taking this really classic show and making it fresh and making it unique," said Alexandra McMillin, marketing and development coordinator for the Raue Center. "Without giving away too much, I think it will quite literally be a circus.

"It's a timeless story that's being completely re-imagined for the William Street Repertory," McMillin said.

Although the circus setting brings new life to "The Fantasticks," Lowry is quick to point out that the cast is what will really make it a main attraction. Williams Street Repertory veterans such as Frank Gaughan, Paul Anderson, Amanda Flahive and Kate Hein will be joined by newcomers like Matthias Austin, Dana Parker, Evan Johnson and John McNally.

Parker and Johnson play the lead roles of Luisa and Matt in this production.

"I'm really happy about the cast," Lowry said. "We've been very fortunate with Williams Street Repertory to attract very good, professional-quality, professional-level performers from the area and a mixture of Chicago and the northwest suburbs."

“We were so surprised when we were able to find such amazing local talent,” McMillin said, adding that much of the cast already has appeared in their “The Fantasticks” roles for the repertory’s float in the Lakeside Festival 4th of July parade earlier this summer.

Before coming to the Raue Center, Lowry spent 15 years in the New York and Connecticut theater communities. During that time, he served as creative director for the New Haven Theater Company and associate producer at Long Wharf Theater, as well as various stints with The Eugene O’Neill Theater Center, Playwrights Horizons and the Signature Theater Company.

Once “The Fantasticks” finishes its run, William Street Repertory’s second season continues with the return of “The Rocky Horror Show,” one of its biggest hits from last season, on Oct. 19.

That show will be followed by “It’s a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play” on Nov. 23, “Company” on Feb. 1, 2013 and “Short Stories and Tall Tales of the American Hero,” an original production by Lowry, on April 13, 2013. The company’s second season wraps with “Steel Magnolias” on April 26, 2013.

McMillin said she has every reason to believe that “The Fantasticks” will be the start of another successful season for Williams Street Repertory. “All in all, (last season) was a very successful year for us, and we’re looking forward to building off the momentum,” she said.

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