

BARRINGTON COURIER-REVIEW

New life for 'Wonderful Life' as a radio play

By Myrna Petlicki | Contributor December 6, 2012 3:40PM

George Bailey learns that his life is worth living in "It's a Wonderful Life: A Radio Play."

Williams Street Repertory takes audiences into a recording studio on Christmas Eve in 1949 to share that heartwarming classic story.

"We think it's a great holiday offering," said Artistic Director Richard Kuranda, who is also executive director of Raue Center for the Arts in Crystal Lake, where the show is being staged. "I think the majority of people have seen the movie and there is something riveting and wonderful when you experience the communal journey.

"The actors bring their characters to life and tell the story in a unique way," the Lakewood resident added. "I think it's going to be really cool."

"I love holiday shows," said director T Paul Lowry of Crystal Lake. "I think it's a great way of connecting to a broader audience."

Lowry particularly likes this holiday show. "Because it's done as a radio play, it presented an opportunity to craft an imaginative way of storytelling," he explained. "It gave me the opportunity to look at the people telling the story. We started from the very beginning focusing in on not necessarily the characters of 'It's a Wonderful Life' but the characters of the radio players and what's going on with their lives that makes it interesting to watch them do 'It's a Wonderful Life.'"

As a backdrop to the show the actors are presenting, Lowry used "the life and drama and conflict within the radio station itself," he said.

Danny Miller of Schaumburg plays actor Steve Stevenson who stars as George Bailey in the radio broadcast. "Steve is kind of a grumpy guy," Miller said. He built a back-story for the character to explain that grumpiness.

"I'm a guy who had an acting career," Miller related. "Then I got drafted so I had to go to the war. While I was over at the war, my wife passed away. I got injured in the war and it had an effect on my acting career. Now I'm stuck doing a radio play."

The actor is enjoying showing the contrast between Steve and his role in the radio play. "What makes it interesting is having that depressive background but then showing the energy as George Bailey," Miller said.

Miller admitted that his portrayal of George Bailey has "a little bit of Jimmy Stewart in it," a natural tendency given that late actor's iconic portrayal in the 1946 Frank Capra film. He described George as "a kind guy who's trying to make things right and things don't seem to go his way."

The actor admitted that playing Steve has had an effect on him. "I catch myself after rehearsals still having an angry face on me," he said.

The 13-member cast also includes Amy Ferraro of Wauconda. The Crystal Lake native plays Ma Bailey, George's mother, in the radio play. "She's a very loving, caring mother," Ferraro said. "She kind of pushes George to go see Mary Hatch," the woman who becomes his wife.

Ferraro's other radio play roles include Mr. Carter, the bank investigator, plus several other men.

"I'm one of the three singers as well," Ferraro reported. The trio's selections include, "Over There," "When Johnny Comes Marching Home," "Brahms' Lullaby," "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing" and "Auld Lang Syne."

Rather than use vintage radio commercials, this production cleverly employs actual advertisements for local businesses. "We're doing them with an old-time commercial feel," director Lowry noted.

Actor Ferraro concluded that even though "It's a Wonderful Life" is often on television this time of year, this production "is another way to enjoy a tradition."

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