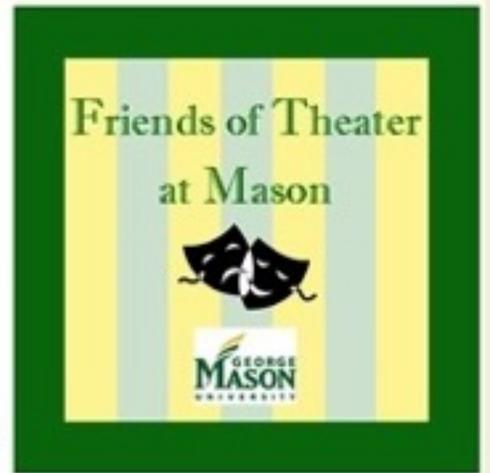


# THEATER AT MASON NEWSLETTER



Published By



**October 2014**

## **PRESIDENT'S CORNER**

### **Almost Time to Solve the Mystery**



By now, you most likely will have received at least a few announcements and invitations to come and see Mason's production of the hit musical *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. Well, this is one last reminder that the production opens this month at the Center for the Arts and the Hylton Performing Arts Center.

This is a musical that you don't want to miss. Last month at the *Arts by George!* gala, the actors led by Ken Elston, Director of the School of Theater and Denny Layendecker, Director of the School of Music wowed audiences with a preview of the show. Comments such as "engaging and fun," "spirited performers" and "loved the music" were heard as audiences exited.

The musical draws its name from an 1870 novel written by Charles Dickens, who died before finishing it. Many scholars have speculated on how Dickens might have ended it. The musical (book, music & lyrics by Rupert Homes) simply stops where the novel stops and lets audiences vote on the outcome. Every performance could have a different one, so songs were written for different endings.

The setting is a traditional English music hall in 1895 with actors strolling the aisles chatting with the audience. A play within a play, the actors portray Victorian actors who play characters from the novel. To learn more, check out the Drood [website](#) where you can read descriptions of the characters by clicking "Meet the Characters" on the red banner across the top of the page. "Meet the Characters" also permits you to access links to New York's Roundabout Theatre's 2012 revival production.

This show is an extraordinary collaboration by the School of Theater and the School of Music and has only come to fruition due to the generosity of gracious donors. This year the Musical

Theater program received a 2-for-1 matching grant challenge from the McCarthy Family Foundation for up to \$25,000. How does it work? If you make a gift of \$10, the Foundation will match it with \$20 to make your \$10 contribution worth \$30. If we raise \$12,500 (above ticket costs) the McCarthy Foundation will match it with \$25,000. So, if you would like to help, you may make a donation at the Friends' welcome table before performances. Or, if you buy your ticket at the box office, you may ask to make an extra donation to the Mason Musical Theater program.

You also might consider joining the Friends of Theater and Friends of Music to celebrate with the cast and crew at a post-performance reception and meet and greet on Grand Tier III on Saturday, October 25, following the 8 pm performance. You will receive premium reserved seating for the performance and recognition of your gift in a special listing in The Mystery of Edwin Drod playbill. The cost is \$50 per person, \$15 of which is tax deductible. If you are interested, please contact Deja' Gibson at the Center for the Performing Arts, 703-993-3927.

However you get there, please come to see our theater and music students shine in their performances. You won't regret it, and you will leave the theater happily having solved "*The Mystery of Edwin Drod*"

I hope to see you there,

Eileen Duggan  
President

## STEP BY STEP

### FIRST REHEARSAL

Friends of Music and Friends of Theater, along with anyone interested, were invited to sit in on the First Rehearsal, which provides an initial glimpse of how a production develops. Drod actors and the tech presentation team began their journey together in mid-September. The designers, who had been hard at work all summer, presented their renderings for sets, costumes, lighting and sound. Following those presentations, the actors had their first read-through of the scripts.





## ICE CREAM SOCIAL



The School of Theater hosted an Ice Cream Social under the tent by the George Mason statue during Alumni Weekend. Ken Elston, the School of Theater Chair, wanted to create a relaxed

environment where students, alumni, friends and staff could meet, mingle and get to know one another. An ice cream truck provided scoops and trimmings for all. The cast of Drood came wearing costume hats, lending an air of frivolity and fun.

## ARTS BY GEORGE!

The annual celebration of the arts was a major event for the School of Theater and School of Music with the Musical Theater program offering music from the upcoming production, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* to appreciative audiences. Several costumes were on display, and, in addition, a group of students were selected to perform with headliner Patti LuPone in the Concert Hall.



# THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD



*Mason's School of Theater and School of Music presents*

## **The Mystery of Edwin Drood**

**Book, Music, and Lyrics by Rupert Holmes**

**Directed by Ken Elston**

**Musical Direction by Dennis Layendecker**

**October 24, 2014 - October 25, 2014 at 8:00 pm**

**October 25, 2014 at 2:00 pm**

**October 26, 2014 at 4:00 pm**

**Concert Hall**

**Tickets:**

**Adults: \$25**

**Alumni, Students, faculty, staff, seniors and group: \$15**

***Also playing at the Hylton Performing Arts Center***

**October 31, 2014 - November 1, 2014 at 8:00 pm**

**November 1, 2014 at 2:00 pm**

**Merchant Hall**

**Tickets:**

**\$25: Adults**

**\$15: Children up to Grade 12**

## Director's Notes

Welcome to our production of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. We are delighted that you joined us for this, our second main stage collaboration between the School of Music and the School of Theater at George Mason University, and our first with our programs in Film and Video Studies and Game Design, in the Center for the Arts. Mason has the best theater venues of, well, anyone, and our programs have built performance opportunities in each. We know this prepares our students in the profession and makes them competitive. For this production, we are adding the experience of traveling (touring or "trucking") the show, and we are excited to perform in the beautiful Hylton Performing Arts Center, as well. The show will be different each night, so feel free to be a part of the show in both places!

This imaginative play-within-a-play invites audience participation, as you, dear friends, will choose our ending. We have enhanced this aspect and invite you to tie in digitally and engage in making choices throughout the production. Audiences of a Victorian, "Music Hall Royale" would have participated in an evening's entertainment in various ways, and we hope you will enjoy your chance to do so with us today. Our company will help you, and I am certain that Dickens, with his keen sense for popular culture, would approve.

For those Dickens purists who have joined us in hopes of seeing a sincere approach to the writer's last, and unfinished, work, we hope you find that experience some day and feel the better for it. Tonight, sit back and enjoy this clever and complex musical comedy. For those familiar with the show, whether from the recent or 1980s Broadway run or from another time and place, we hope you find a few surprises and a richly fulfilling evening in the theater. Please enjoy the show.



## TRUCKIN' TO THE HYLTON

This year for the very first time, the Mason Musical will go on tour and be transported to Merchant Hall in the Hylton Performing Arts Center for three final performances. The distance isn't far—Google Maps suggests approximately 20 miles— but the production value to Mason theater students is huge. Ethan Osborne, Technical Director of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* explained some of the issues involved.

There are several areas to consider when a show goes "on the road"— Sets, Costumes, Props, Lighting, and Projections. It is important that all these things remain stable and exactly the same since there is negligible rehearsal time in the second venue. The sets come from the

Scene Shop of the School of Theater, where they were conceptually designed by Clayton Austin, Associate Professor of Theater and built by Ethan Osborne, Assistant Technical Director with Tim Cooke, technical students, and interns. Costumes, designed by Laurel Dunayer, and props will be move from Fairfax to Manassas. Lighting design by Autumn Casey, includes Hylton elements returned to their home, and the projection equipment is rented from the same source for both venues. All of this contributes to stability and continuity.

The planned tour was considered in final design decisions. The set is large--- fourteen feet tall and weighing 80 pounds. It had to be constructed to be broken down into squares and rectangles that fit a twelve foot panel truck. The Scene Shop employs a computer graphics program, SketchUp, to provide virtual loading.

The company will strike the show immediately after the Sunday matinee at the Center for the Arts, loading the set directly into the truck and driving to the Prince William campus, where it will be unloaded. Ethan suggests that it will take three or four trips to get everything in place.

## BE A KID AGAIN – COME SEE THE CIRCUS



Remember when you were a kid and got excited about the circus and all it's wonderful performers – the clowns, the acrobats, the jugglers, the showgirls, the animal tamer, the strongman and the ringmaster? Well, you can see them all again when the circus comes to town (actually, to TheaterSpace) on November 7 and 8. On these two night the magic of the circus will once again come alive in Mason professor David Gaines' one-man show *A Little Business at the Big Top*.

As you know, many of our Mason theater professors are working artists who not only teach their craft, but perform, imagine and create on local and national stages. One example is David Gaines, who specializes in physical theater and mime. Many of us had the good fortune a couple of seasons ago to see David's 7(x1) Samurai, a spoof of Kurasawa's classic film, The Seven Samurai. David portrayed 45 characters from the film, and this time he portrays every circus performer.

David has performed the show around the country to rave reviews.

A writer for [Milwaukee.Mag.com](http://Milwaukee.Mag.com) wrote: It's a tour de force of story telling and physical theater, imbued with wit, hilarious physical humor, and even a few touches of genuine pathos. ... It's dazzling.

A blogger from the Rochester, NY Fringe Festival reported: Sans stage props, David Gaines prompts imagination. The man is pure electricity, the mime child of Steve Martin and Charlie Chaplin ... I saw the circus tent, the animals, the tight rope. My imagination hasn't seen this much action in ages ... it was truly magical.

If you caught the previous show, you won't want to miss this one. If you've never seen David, you owe it to yourself to see his theater artistry in action.

## **A LITTLE BUSINESS AT THE BIG TOP**

**Written and performed by David Gaines**

**Directed by Susan Thompson-Gaines**

**November 7, 2014 - November 8, 2014 at 8:00 pm  
TheaterSpace**

**Tickets:**

**\$25 adults**

**\$15 students, faculty, staff, seniors and groups**

## **THOUGHTS FROM THE ARTIST**

For a number of years, while performing my show "7 (x1) Samurai" around the country, I kept periodically dreaming of and toying with creating a new piece that could bring the comedy of clowning, the drama of the circus atmosphere, and the absurd comic logic of cartoons to the live theatre.

As luck would have it, I got a call from a colleague at the Celebration Barn Theatre in Maine, inviting me and some other artists – if we had a piece that we wanted to explore – to come and use their space for an intensive 10 days of work, helping each other with the development of our works. The result of that time, and subsequent work that my director and I put into finishing of the piece, is the performance that I am now delighted to present at my "home court" – George Mason University.

An interesting and fitting side-note to this is that when I first began working on the earliest version of this piece, before I was a teacher at George Mason, I needed someone to show the fledgling idea to. Someone to check to see if it was a waste of time to pursue the entire concept; in the parlance of the David Letterman show, was this "something" or was this "nothing"?

The person I chose to trust with this sacred test was a man whom I had gotten to know at a conference at GMU, a movement theatre savvy guy, and one whose spirit I felt was "sympatico", and whose theatrical opinion I could trust. That man was and is the Chair of the School of Theater at Mason, Ken Elston.

He encouraged me then (after seeing the work), and I hope you will now agree that he was not wrong to do so. It gives me great pleasure to share with the Mason audience my new show: "A Little Business at the Big Top". For me it is like a marriage of Chaplin and Popeye, played in the absurd and frantic style for which I have become known. I hope you find it sweet, touching, funny, and delightful.

See you at the Circus...

Sincerely,  
David Gaines

## COOKOUT FOR THE ARTS

Once again Paulette and Mack Miller opened their home and yard to Friends for a cookout celebrating theater and Arts By George! It was a lovely August afternoon. Those present enjoyed great food and drink, and shared their love of the arts while being entertained by Mason Improv. A good time was had by all. Please join us next year.



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