

Friday, March 13, 2015
Abilene Reporter-News

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HALL PASS

What: Hardin-Simmons University theater department presents "Bullies" (musical)
When: 7:30 p.m. Thursday, March 20, 21, 26-28 and 2 p.m. March 29
Where: Van Ellis Theatre, 2410 Cedar St., on campus
Tickets: \$10 for adults; \$7 for military/seniors/students; \$5 for HSU faculty, staff and students

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JANET VAN VLEET

COLUMNIST

HSU grad to fill theater vacuum

Last year, McMurry University's theater department canceled its summer dinner theater season because of the retirement of Philip Craik, the theater professor who was the driving force behind it.

It's possible there may be a single show later in the summer, according to McMurry theater professor Charlie Hukill. It's still under consideration.

This year, the Abilene Shakespeare Festival at Abilene Christian University is going on hiatus. Founder Adam Hester will be taking part in workshops in New York this summer on a musical he wrote (more on this down the road), and associate theater professor Dawne Meeks is expecting a baby at the end of May.

But don't despair, theater lovers. Ryan McBride has you covered.

McBride, who graduated from Hardin-Simmons University in 2012 with a bachelor's degree in acting, will launch Abilene Live Theatre this summer. Hurray!

He said he's been mulling a summer theater season over the past few years, but hadn't been able to make it happen until now. The timing is rather fortuitous, given the situation at McMurry and ACU.

"The only thing we've got this summer is the Paramount production and whatever the community theater might do," McBride said.

Though the plays will be performed at HSU's Van Ellis Theatre, Abilene Live Theatre is not connected to the university in any other way.

The first play, "Dog Sees God: Confessions of a Teenage Blockhead," is a dark comedy that imagines what the Peanuts gang would be up to in high school.

The 2004 play has not been authorized by Charles Schulz's estate or the company that owns the rights to Peanuts. The characters' names have been changed a bit (the lead character is CB) and the First Amendment has been invoked at times to avoid legal action.

This is not the Peanuts we read growing up. The play opens at the funeral of CB's beloved dog, who contracted rabies and had to be put down.

The characters swear

See VAN VLEET, 3B

'BULLIES'

COME TO LIFE

Play examines effects of behavior on others

By Janet Van Vleet

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Facebook resonates with stories about bullying — about children killing themselves because of peer pressure and schools taking a hard line with zero tolerance.

Hardin-Simmons University's theater department tackles that topical subject with its new musical, "Bullies," which opens Thursday in the Van Ellis Theatre.

HSU has the honor of being the first university to produce a full version of the play.

"It's about human nature," said Barry Smoot, artistic director for the Paramount Theatre, who is directing the play. "There are a lot of current topics. It shows the consequences people can have on other people with physical and emotional bullying."

The story behind this play isn't what one might expect. Playwright/composer Brock Walsh wasn't bullied as a child, but he said he was deeply moved by stories about teen suicide and bullying.

When it comes to writing songs, Walsh has an impressive pedigree. He has 28 soundtrack credits from movies such as "John Q," "The Truth About Cats & Dogs," "Legends of the Fall" and "Hocus Pocus." He's written songs for Christina Aguilera ("Blessed"), Pointer Sisters ("Automatic") and Bette Midler ("Lullaby in Blue").

To make the story and the characters as genuine as possible, Walsh approached Steven McCarthy, head of the Arts Education Branch for the Los Angeles Unified School District.

Walsh asked McCarthy for access to a classroom and theater students.

See BULLIES, 4B

Hardin-Simmons University freshman Fabian Carrisalez plays Joshua, the target of a bully, in the HSU production of "Bullies." The musical opens Thursday. THOMAS METTHE/REPORTER-NEWS



Our three picks

1

CLASSIC COUNTRY

The Country Gold Tour rolls into Abilene with a concert featuring five country music legends — Leroy Van Dyke, Jim Ed Brown, Helen Cornelius, T.G. Sheppard, and Jimmy Fortune — singing their best-known hits at 7:30 p.m. Friday at the Abilene Civic Center, 1100 N. Sixth St. Tickets range from \$22-\$38, depending on seat location. For more information, or to purchase tickets, contact 800-585-3737 or www.startickets.com.



2

SNAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL

It's time for the Sweetwater Jaycees World's Largest Rattlesnake Round-Up this weekend. The three-day event will include live snakes, fried snakes and the new Miss Snake Charmer. Other fun includes a coin-gun-knife show, a carnival and a rattlesnake-eating contest. Tickets cost \$10 for adults, \$5 for military and children ages 5-12, and are free for children 4 and younger. Some events have additional costs. For more information, call 325-235-5488.

3

A RIBBETING ACTIVITY

Head over to the Abilene Zoo, 2070 Zoo Lane, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday for Exploration Day and learn all about the special frogs who make their home at the zoo, including the colorful coqui frogs from Puerto Rico. Admission costs \$6 for adults, \$5 for seniors and \$3.50 for children 3-12. Children 2 and younger are admitted free. Wander over and give the new camels a gander while you're there. For more information, call 325-676-6085.

Just a reminder

Don't forget about these events happening this weekend:

FRIDAY

■ JB and the Moonshine Band will perform at 9:30 p.m. Friday at Ray's Bar & Dancehall, 1850 S. Clack St. Admission is \$10. For more information, or to purchase tickets, call 325-704-2510 or visit www.raysbarabilene.com.

FRIDAY-SATURDAY

■ The Paramount Theatre, 352 Cypress St., will present John Wayne's 1961 Western "The Comancheros" as part of its Paramount Film Series. Showtimes are 7:30 p.m. Friday, and 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. Saturday. Robert Holladay, director of films at the Paramount, welcomes

stuntman and actor Dean Smith to his lecture series featuring discussion of the history and making of the film at 6:30 p.m. Friday (ticket to that evening's performance of "The Comancheros" required to attend). Tickets are \$6 for adults, \$5 for students, seniors, military and children. For more information, contact 325-676-9620 or visit www.paramount-abilene.org.

SATURDAY

■ The National Center for Children's Illustrated Literature, 102 Cedar St., offers art activities on the

See REMINDER, 3B