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CATCO, RED HERRING, OTTERBEIN HONORED

By Michael Grossberg THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH July 17, 2003 Publication: Columbus Dispatch, The (OH) Page: 06B Word Count: 579

Contemporary American Theatre Company, Red Herring Theatre Ensemble and Otterbein College's Theater Department are the big winners in the 10th annual Central Ohio Theatre Critics Circle poll for seasonal theater achievement. CATCO's *The Laramie Project* won for best production of a play last season. The runner-up: Red Herring Theatre Ensemble's *The Lonesome West*.

Also nominated: CATCO's *Lobby Hero* and *Kindertransport*, Red Herring's *Anton in Show Business* and Phoenix Theatre Circle's *Just So Stories*.

Otterbein Summer Theatre's *Smoke on the Mountain* won best musical. (Several cast members returned in the sequel, *More Smoke on the Mountain: Sanders Family Christmas*, which opened yesterday at Otterbein Summer Theatre.)

Also nominated for best musical: Otterbein College Theatre's *Kiss Me Kate* and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, Columbus Children's Theatre's *The Great Gilly Hopkins* and *Oliver!*, and Reality Theatre's *Naked Boys Singing!*

The poll's strongest consensus was reflected in voting for best new work. The winner: *A/ThePostModernLoveStory*, BlueForms Theatre Group's collage of movement, music and monologues about love.

Also nominated: *Trashin' the Draft*, Steve Guyer, James Makofsky and David Whitehouse's

adaptation of Arlo Guthrie's story for Shadowbox Cabaret's Peace, Love and Shadowbox; and Red Herring's production of Mark Evans Bryan's Mercury Seven With Signs Following.

Sue Ott Rowlands won best actress for her solo turn as two Ohio women in Mercury Rising.

Also nominated: Ann Bourke, Red Herring's Quake; Kerry Shanklin and Amy Warner, CATCO's Kindertransport; and Traci Hutchison, Red Herring's Anton in Show Business.

Geoffrey Nelson won best actor for his solo turn as baseball manager Branch Rickey in CATCO's Rickey. The runner-up: Greg Hoffman, Iago in Actors' Theatre's Othello.

Also nominated: Kevin Ford Carty and Ralph Hall in Red Herring's The Lonesome West, and David Beukema in Otterbein's Blithe Spirit.

A. Lorraine Robinson won best director for CATCO's well-balanced The Laramie Project.

Also nominated: Robert Behrens Just So Stories; Pamela Hill, Kindertransport; Maureen Ryan, Lonesome West; Lesley Ferris, Ohio State University's Sleep Deprivation Chamber; Jonathan Putnam, CATCO's Escanaba in Da Moonlight; and Matt Slaybaugh, A/ThePostModernLoveStory.

The poll covers productions that opened between July 1, 2002, and June 30 and reflects the votes of theater critics from Columbus Alive, The Other Paper, Suburban News Publications and The Dispatch.

Licking County season

Licking County Players' next season will embrace three musicals, three comedies and two mysteries -- but no dramas.

"Most of our audience is older, and they want to be entertained," said business manager Bob DeBenedictis, who co-founded the community theater in 1965.

"They like musicals, comedies and mysteries, but our dramas really haven't sold well."

Case in point: A Trip to Bountiful, last season's only drama and the troupe's low ticket-seller.

Hence, the community theater will launch and end its 38th season with lighthearted musicals: Into the Woods (Sept. 5-21) and Godspell (July 16 to Aug. 1).

The troupe also will offer more seriously tuneful fare: Yours, Anne (Jan. 23 to Feb. 8), a musical version of The Diary of Anne Frank.

The season will include two Neil Simon comedies: Fools (Dec. 5-21) and Prisoner of Second Avenue (April 23-May 9).

The third comedy is also a mystery: The Mystery of Irma Vep (June 4-20), Charles Ludlam's cross-dressing spoof of a Victorian melodrama.

The other mysteries: Light in the Tunnel (Oct. 17-Nov. 2), which emphasizes psychological suspense; and Over My Dead Body (March 12-28), a comic-murder mystery about a club of London mystery writers.

All performances are at 8 p.m., except the final 2 p.m. Sunday performances, at 131 W. Main St., Newark.

For more information, call 740-349-2287.

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