

H O M E T O W N

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The Kentwood Players; "George Washington Slept Here"

By Conrad Hurtt

I interviewed Philip Brickey, the director of the 1940 Kaufman and Hart comedy in the Westchester Playhouse.

HomeTown News: I thought it might be fun to talk about some of the witty, off-hand references that the characters make during the play. These come at the audience so fast, that if we talk about them here, future audiences will be ready for them.

Brickey: Okay, I actually did do a lot of research during the play, and looked up the references to make sure at least WE were getting the jokes.

HTN: Susie McCarthy, as Annabelle Fuller, says, "Makes you feel like the Emperor Jones"—in response to the horrible continuous thumping sound of a well drill, crashing through stone.

Brickey: Oh, that's an easy one. "The Emperor Jones" is a 1920 play by Eugene O'Neill that featured pulsing drums and gunshots in a dramatic jungle setting. This takes place in the country and has a rifle.

HTN: Correct! You get the next question right and we go to the bonus round.

Brickey: So soon?

HTN: Marlene Grinde as Mrs. Douglas, says, "We investigated, and we discovered George Washington never slept here. It was Benedict Arnold"—in response to an old legend about the house.

Brickey: Yes, this is one of the biggest punch lines of the play. And Marlene delivers it perfectly. Should we give it away now?

HTN: Why not?

Brickey: Benedict Arnold was an American general in the Revolutionary War, until he shifted his allegiance to the British in 1780 by accepting a bribe to surrender. He died a penniless traitor in England. The funny part is that all this time the main characters of our play

thought that it was the noble George Washington that slept in their house.

HTN: Tim Forsyth as Newton Fuller does a great job of being particularly crestfallen at this news.

Brickey: Tim is very watchable, and a real fun guy to work with. Yes, his bright and sunny optimism does take a dip there.

HTN: And now, the bonus round: It's Annabelle Fuller again—she has a lot of the one-liners.

Brickey: She's a real terrific actress. I had seen her in "Romeo & Juliet" and was hoping she would come down and read for me, and she did. She keeps the play moving.

HTN: She says, "I've got a name for this place: Wuthering Heights"—in response to the wild storm raging around the country house.

Brickey: You mind if I look at my notes? "Wuthering Heights" is the name of an ancient manor in the wild, stormy countryside of the remote Yorkshire moors in Emily Bronte's 1847 passionate novel. In our play the water comes INTO the house, in a big way.

HTN: I really enjoyed that part. Scot Renfro designed the water gag?

Brickey: Yes, and Grant Francis took up the challenge of building a set within a set.

HTN: I stayed in during intermission just to see if thirteen people could actually change that set in five minutes. Let's get back to these references: Catherine Rahm as Rena Leslie says, "I can't decide whom Raymond resembles—Leopold or Loeb"—in response to the rudeness of the trouble-making boy played by Logan O'Brien.

Brickey: I have worked with the fourteen-year-old Logan twice before now, he's a true professional. And Catherine is so classy in Maria Cohen's gown. Let's see... can I go on the Internet again? Nathan Leopold age 20 and Richard Loeb age 19, confessed to the kidnapping and



Pictured left to right: Cast members Susie McCarthy, Tim Forsyth, and Catherine Rahm.

murder with a chisel of 14-year-old Bobbie Franks in Chicago in 1924. How am I doing so far?

HTN: You're a walking encyclopedia! All right, here's a tough one: Annabelle Fuller says, "You'll see some of the finest buttering since the spring of 1912"—deciding to sweet-talk Vic Helford as Uncle Stanley into making a deal.

Brickey: Go see this play just to see Vic—his comic timing is sensational, and his performance funnier than it was on the page.

HTN: I have seen this play—I love the way his character transforms at the end; he becomes so warm and likable. Back to the question.

Brickey: Yeah, this one had us confused. At first we thought it might be just a really good year for butter, or cream, or milk in general. But when I looked up the spring of 1912 on the Internet, I found that during a whirlwind of diplomacy, Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Montenegro (Yugoslavia) agreed to combine their soldiers against Turkey. In the spring of 1912 they amassed 750,000 soldiers to fight together. So

you see, Annabelle is trying her own bit of diplomacy to try to match the one in the Balkans.

HTN: You expect me to believe that?

Brickey: Yes!

HTN: Last one: Rena Leslie says, "Say, what is this? "Tobacco Road?"—upon seeing everyone drinking alcohol and getting drunk.

Brickey: I have no idea. No, "Tobacco Road" is a 1932 novel by Erskine Caldwell, about a large family that lives in a dilapidated farmhouse in a rural backwater that the bank plans to take over. When you see our play you'll see how appropriate that comment is.

GEORGE WASHINGTON SLEPT HERE, 8301 Hindry Avenue, (310) 645-5156, 7/7/06-8/12/06, Fridays & Saturdays at 8 p.m., Sundays at 2 p.m., \$16, or \$14 for students/seniors/military.

Conrad Hurtt has worked variously as an actor, dancer, stuntman, model, and voice-over artist in commercials, television shows, theatre, film, and opera.

CHESTER WEST



By Jack Younger