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'Banging the Bell' takes encore on EPCC stage

Theater lovers who love to see original shows will get another chance to see an El Paso artist's work if they missed the shows at the Glass Box Theater — and help fund a theater scholarship.

El Pasoan Ted Karber Jr.'s original comedy, "Banging the Bell," will be remounted on the EPCC stage, will all ticket sales going to help EPCC's theatre scholarship fund.

Karber is a part-time faculty member at EPCC.

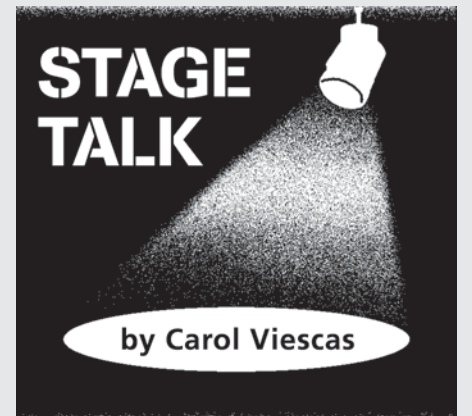
"Keith Townsend (EPCC theatre artistic director) had mentioned that there existed a theatre scholarship fund which was frequently funded by their summer season," Karber said. "When I approached Matthew Smith (the theatre discipline coordinator) and Keith about doing my show, I pointed out it would be a good vehicle for their scholarship fund because there's no cost for the show."

Karber has a long (and award-winning) history in theater. He earned his B.A. in English and Theatre Arts from UTEP in 1985 and his M.A. in Theatre Arts in 1988. He was founder and artistic director of Aardvark Theatre, Inc., which ran from 1996-2005. He has directed many plays, including O'Neill's "Long Day's Journey into Night"; Williams' "A Streetcar Named Desire," "The Glass Menagerie," "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof," "Orpheus Descending," "Suddenly, Last Summer" and "The Seven Descents of Myrtle"; Garcia Lorca's "The House of Bernarda Alba"; Beckett's "Happy Days"; and Ibsen's "Hedda Gabler."

Most of his work has been serious. "My play 'Bunty's Bones' dealt with the retelling of the Christ story. 'Irresponsible Gravity' dealt with levels of deceit in a twisted south Texas family. My most well known work is 'Precious Heart,' which is really about several women in my life; my mom, my godmother and a distant cousin many times removed. 'Precious Heart' was presented as part of the Jewel Box Series last year. It has also become a very popular vehicle for the multiple talents of Greg Smith in Ohio. It seems my plays always center around life in Texas and that archetypal female power which binds people together."

His plays also often center on women, as does "Banging the Bell."

"I decided I wanted to try my hand (or pen, that is) at a full-fledged comedy. I like writing women's roles, so I found five female characters I liked and thought were fun, I pushed them around



a little, found which story they wanted to tell and then set out to make people laugh," Karber said.

The story is set in south Texas in the mid-1990s.

"It centers around the antics of five friends, local social matrons who are preparing for the yearly cotillion," Karber said. "In an unexpected twist of events, the five women must band together to help save the already tarnished reputation of one of their ranks. In order to help her, they agree to help hide the corpulent body of a local political figure, and in so doing they start a set of comic events that get more and more ridiculous and hilarious."

His cast is a list of El Paso theatre who's who:

"Amanda Vasquez plays Opal Marie Thorn. Rafaela Graffos plays Marlene Shinn. Carol Bernstein plays Ina Jo Mott. Kathryn Forest plays RubyLee Hyatt. Valerie Hart AND David Villanueva play Candymine Ballinger (for alternating performances). Michael Bernstein plays the sheriff, and Shaun Nixon plays the deputy, Looty Beaver. It is a solid cast and they are making the play very funny. The biggest joy for a playwright is always to hear his words spoken, taken seriously, coddled and cared for by actors."

His biggest challenge, he said, was directing his own work.

"I have to distance myself from the script as a writer and look at it more clinically, more severely... as a director," he said. "It's been great because I've been able to fix some difficulties with the play, cut some lines, streamline a few parts. But... ultimately, the reaction of the audience will be the only proof that the play is successful."

Carol Viescas is a veteran of community theater and teaches journalism at Bel Air High School.

"Banging the Bell: A Texas Comedy in Two Acts" will be presented at 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday and 2:30 p.m. Sunday, **May 26-June 4**, at EPCC Transmountain Forum Theatre.

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