

Players get best wishes from a pro

"Hope all goes well with your production — best wishes to you and the entire cast," wrote William Hutt, director of the Stratford production of "Tartuffe."

His comments were in a recent letter sent to Dee Dwelley, director of the final offering of the Birmingham Village Players 57th season.

"Tartuffe," a comedy by French playwright Moliere, will feature sets designed by Dave Zeese and Don Nagel of the players.

The play will open at 8:30 p.m. May 9 at the playhouse on Chestnut Street at Hunter Boulevard in Birmingham. Other performances will be at 8:30

theater

p.m. May 10, 16, 17, and 7:30 p.m. May 11.

Reservations and ticket information are available from Rita Gray, ticket chairperson, at 644-2075.

TARTUFFE, a rascally con-artist who first ingratiates himself into a proud family and then proceeds to swindle them, is played by Dike Dwelley, husband of the director. Veteran players in the cast include

Boris Sellers as Orgon, Harriet Fox as Madame Pernelle, Barbara Underwood as Dorine and John Unruh as Valere.

Still other familiar faces include Kim Cooke as Damis, Dana Clough as Mariane, Barbara Elpern as Elmire, Larry Sweet as Cleante and Amy Worrell as Filopote. Supporting roles will be taken by Sid Britton, Vince Dunne and Joe Minella.

The story of "Tartuffe" is well known to theatergoers who love French farce. Originally commissioned by Louis XIV, the play was X-rated in its own time. Because it was a scathing attack on religious hypocrisy, it could not be performed publicly until five years after it was written.

The plot concerns Tartuffe, a fast-talking swindler, who has wormed his way into the confidence of Orgon, a wealthy businessman. Orgon believes him to be a fountainhead of piety and honesty.

By degrees Tartuffe dominates the household, living on Orgon's money, running the affairs of everyone else in the family and even making advances to Orgon's wife.

Orgon is completely captivated by him, even though other members of the household see right through his antics. Not until the end of the play, after a series of hilarious and unexpected events, does Orgon finally realize what a sitting duck he has been.



Beneath all this is a guy named John Leabu, one of two people who plays Bongo the Gorilla for fun and profit. (Staff photo by Art Emanuele)

Ape for hire

Talking gorilla makes a hit

My name is Bongo and I bring along a bunch of bananas to you with a song. I sing and I dance and I monkey around and pass out this tropical fruit by the pound.

If the whole world is a stage, somebody's got to be the gorilla, of course. So along come Mike Donley and John Leabu, two guys who play the part of Bongo the Gorilla to the hilt.

For \$20, they'll gladly provide the highlight of anyone's day. One of them plays the gorilla and the other is the trainer, complete with whip and chain.

In the month they've been flirting with evolution, the jobs have varied from throwing bananas at a bartender for his birthday to singing an apologetic song for a woman who got into a fight with her boss.

"They were hired to throw a cream pie in the face of one guy. The victim ducked to miss the pie but was such a good sport that he picked it up and threw it in his own face.

"Women will run down the hall and lock themselves in the bathroom," Donley says. "But older women have a tendency to hug you," adds Leabu. "There's

something about this furry creature they like."

They say their strangest assignment was to show up at a party in a large house in Birmingham.

"Bongo goes up to the door and rings the bell," Leabu says. "It's this big mansion. The door opens and thousands of flashbulbs are blinding me. People are standing around sipping cocktails. Very dignified. "I asked where the banana nut bread is."

THIS ALL GOT started when Donley, who runs a gag store in Taylor, noticed the big interest in costumes for Halloween. For bookings, Bongo is reached at 287-4890.

"Everybody wants a laugh," Donley says. "I never expected to go this big."

The duo is planning to expand to include a couple other characters — Spiderman, for instance — and to do free charity appearances.

It brings out the ham in them. A mild-mannered, relatively normal guy puts on a gorilla suit and Bongo is born. He grunts, hops up and down, and generally acts like a gorilla.

"My wife has pointed out to me," Leabu says, "that actually it's an improvement in my personality."

Barbershop chapters join for spectacular

The Clarkston and Waterford/Drayton Rotary clubs will sponsor, in association with the Southeast Michigan Barbershop Chapters of SPEBSQSA, Inc., a Barbershop Spectacular Festival from 8-11 p.m. Saturday, May 24, at Fine Knob.

The event will feature award-winning quartets and choruses, such as the Classic Collection. Also appearing on stage will be district champions Great Lakes Express and the comedy quartet Schizophrenics.

A mass chorus presentation will set a world record for the number of singers on a stage at any one time — and as such will be entered in the Guinness

concerts

Book of Records. Advance tickets are available from Clarkston and Waterford/Drayton Rotarians, members of the Southeast Michigan Barbershop Chapters of SPEBSQSA, Inc., or Hudson's at Northland, Oakland and Pontiac malls. Various charities annually supported by the sponsors will benefit. Tickets will be available at the gate.

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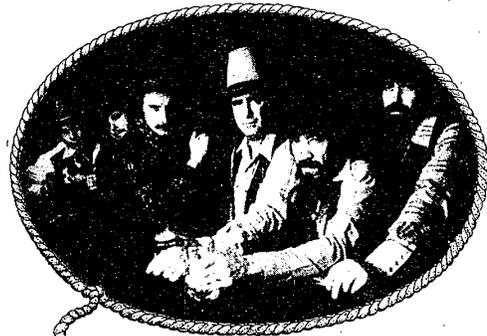
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