

Gallery On Stage by Patricia McAlpine

A Barn-Raising Romp

25 years of the arts at RWU

For 25 years, the Performing Arts Center at Roger Williams University in Bristol has trained students in dance and performance art, music and theatre. The William N. Grandgeorge Theatre at The Barn has been the setting for numerous performances for students, alumni and the community as well. The year-long celebration of this momentous occasion culminates this month with "The Barn Silver Jubilee: A Celebration of Performance" on Saturday, June 9 and will feature performances and reminiscences from alumni

History

This is not only a celebration of 25 years of performance, but also a celebration of historic preservation. The Barn, which originated from two historic barns built by Henry Salsbury in 1840 and 1894 that sat on the Whipple Steers Farm in Gloucester, Rhode Island, was disassembled, rebuilt and adapted for reuse by historic preservation students under the guidance of Professor Kevin Jordan over a five-year period in the 1980s. The undertaking was done in collaboration with Professor William Grandgeorge, then head of the theater department, for whom the space is named. In 1984, students organized a barn-raising that was also used to raise funds. Those in attendance signed a register, which is still buried in a time capsule on the site. By 1986, the Performing Arts Center was completed and *Gyps and Dolls* opened the new theatre under the direction of Professor Grandgeorge.

Since that time, the Performance Arts Center has been a home for students in the performing arts and an entertainment mecca for the East Bay community. In a conversation with Professor Jeffrey Martin, current chair of the Performing Arts Center, he notes that the theater department has produced at least 150 full-length plays since the opening of The Barn. Martin continues, "Overall probably 300 play productions were produced over the 25 years - and this is not including dance and musical performances."

Martin, who began his tenure in

1988, has also been witness to some of the antics of The Barn's most notorious patron, the ghost Banquo. "Banquo is often blamed for numerous things such as a light that goes on when the light board is in essence turned off," he says. Martin continues to explain that during the run of *Forbidden Planet*, which sold out half its performances in April, Banquo occasionally screwed around with the electronics. Martin takes this as a sign that Banquo liked the production and reveals that there is a chair on the second floor gallery reserved for the beloved ghost.

Haunted Corner

Martin understands that the ghost traveled with the barn from Gloucester. According to an article in *Roger Williams University Magazine*, the ghost made its presence known at the start of the dismantling project as students noticed that an unusual number of minor disasters occurred in a particular corner of the barn, which is fondly known as 'the haunted corner,' located in the rear of the performance space. The ghost is suspected to be the grandson of Thomas Whipple Steers, who died as an elderly man in that corner of the barn after leaving the state's mental health facility. The name Banquo was adopted by students over the years as a nod to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, a play that carries a bit of superstition of its own - particularly to those in the theatre.

The Silver Jubilee Celebration

Professor Dorisa Boggs, Director of Design for the Performing Arts Center, is producing this month's Silver Jubilee Celebration with some of the arts center's alumni. The revue, *Try to Remember*, will feature songs from musicals, along with scenes and monologues from previous years. Alumni will reprise pieces that they performed 20 or 25 years ago. Martin and Boggs say, "It's all about the celebration, with props from The Barn and past productions, with alumni performing for people who made the theater what it is: the students' past and present." Focusing on theater alumni, the Silver Jubilee



is part of the annual Alumni Weekend Celebration. Expected in attendance will be the University President and his wife as well as Emeritus Professor Grandgeorge, who Martin says, "is still a beloved member of the department and community."

Martin says, "It is a department-run celebration and current students are excited about it. The department is a tight knit group and both he and Professor Boggs are intensely involved with the students on a daily basis." You could almost say it's like fam-

ily. In one visit, a couple of students relaxed on the second floor loft that also houses Martin's office, lounging on comfy chairs.

After the Silver Jubilee, The Barn, which is as much a part of RWU's and Bristol's history today as it was a part of Gloucester's historic past, will hopefully continue to bring performances to the community for another 25 years, starting with a production of David Mamet's *Boston Marriage* in July. *One Old Ferry Road, Bristol. www.rwu.edu. 401-254-3666*