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Apr 23 2010

Two times three equals charity

pdf email

Written by Ellen Chahey



HANNAH VAN SCIVER PHOTO

ON THE COVER AND THIS PAGE – Restaurateur Bill Zammer and Arts Foundation of Cape Cod board president Maggie Van Sciver are two of the six prominent Cape Codders who will perform A.R. Gurney's *Love Letters* at Cotuit Center for the Arts April 30 to May 2.

Six prominent Cape Codders to share *Love Letters* at fundraiser

What is it like to direct three separate casts – each of only two people – who need to portray characters who share the “hopes and ambitions, dreams and disappointments, victories and defeats in letters that have passed between them throughout their separated lives”?

That is how publicity from the Cotuit Center for the Arts describes *Love Letters*. The play by A.R. Gurney will be performed April 30, May 1, and May 2, each time with a different pair of well-known Cape Codders: real-life husband and wife Van and Wendy Northcross at 8 p.m. on the 30th; Maggie Van Sciver and Bill Zammer at 8 p.m. on the 1st; and Mindy Todd and Rob O’Leary on the 2nd.

“Well,” said Melinda Gallant, who is directing the performances, “it’s actually a bit like herding cats.” The very different personalities of the actors – and acting “is off the beaten track for them”, she said – makes directing them “fun and challenging. All of them bring their unique voices to the play. Van has a bit of a southern accent and Rob sounds like a Kennedy. Bill’s voice is very strong, but he can bring it down very softly.”

All three performances are benefits for the Cotuit Center for the Arts and the American Cancer Society.

The Cotuit Center was founded in 1993 and incorporated as a non-profit charitable organization in 1995, according to a press release.

Gallant, who said that she has “done theater all my life” as an actor, improviser, and director, said that she liked the blend of beneficiaries: “the Cancer Society for the body and the Cotuit Center for the mind.”

Wendy and Van Northcross are, respectively, CEO of the Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce and marketing and community relations director of Cape Cod Healthcare.

Maggie Van Sciver is president of the Arts Foundation of Cape Cod board, and William Zammer is president of Cape Cod Restaurants.

Mindy Todd hosts *The Point* on WCAI-FM and Rob O’Leary is state senator for the Cape & Islands District.

“They’ve all been so gracious with their time,” said Gallant.

The play, which was first performed in the 1980s, now poses a question that its author could never have foreseen then, said Gallant. “Many people have been asking me if it seems dated because it’s about letters. And it’s true – when the audience enters, it’s formal. There are just two desks.”

Gallant said she would welcome a play about “romances rekindled by e-mail, Facebook, and other media,” but she doesn’t believe that letters are dated. “Maybe much shorter now,” she said, but still written and saved.

Directing the play with three casts has had all kinds of interesting challenges, Gallant said. She rehearses them separately, and sometimes only one actor at a time.

That one of the stage couples is married in real life does show in their performance, Gallant said. “They know each other,” she said of the Northcrosses. “But this is a play of nuances, and each pair brings their own nuance. The best way to see these performances would be to see all three.”

She also has to work with stage directions written in no uncertain terms by the playwright.

“Even though Mr. Gurney says no, we have used a little bit of lighting,” she said. “Just a bit to heat things up or cool things down along with the story.”

Gallant said that the Center plans to produce *Love Letters* again next year. “We’ll be looking for interesting people, so watch out,” she warned.

Tickets for *Love Letters* are \$30, or \$50 for both the show and a cocktail reception with the stars of the show after the performance. Each ticket is discounted by \$5 for patrons who buy tickets for all three performances. To buy tickets, or for more information, call the Cotuit Center for the Arts at 508-428-0669 or visit cotuitcenterforthearts.org.