

The Heiress

It has what you want in a stage drama - period.

The Players 2011 season is opening February 18 with a Tony award-winning period drama and is an adaptation of Henry James' novel *Washington Square*. *The Heiress* was written by Ruth and Augustus Goetz and premiered on Broadway in 1947; starred Basil Rathbone and Wendy Hiller and was produced by Fred F. Finklehoffe (See related story on page 2). The play was revived on Broadway in 1995 when it won a Tony Award for Best Revival of A Play for that year.

The play is set in the drawing room of a mansion in an affluent residential square in New York City during the 1850's. It immerses us in the life of Catherine Sloper, a wealthy, yet commonplace, young woman of a retiring and reserved disposition. Unexpectedly, she meets and is wooed by an attractive young man, Morris Townsend, and ultimately falls desperately in love.

We witness Catherine's anguish, and feel her pain as she is torn between her wealthy father, Dr. Austin Sloper, who has dominated her life since birth, and the promise of a bright future with a man she dared not dream could be hers. Add to this mix a foolish, meddling aunt with other members of two intertwined families and you have a story of love, selfishness, hope and plot-turning surprises. *The Heiress* has occasional humor that lightly taps you on the shoulder and brutal reality that slaps you in the heart.

The Heiress is directed by **Robert Scott FitzGerald** (see related article on page 3) who recently directed *Pinocchio* for the Players and was Scrooge in the Players production of *Inspecting Carol*. FitzGerald is a newly elected member of the Players board of directors and has been named artistic director for the organization. He is assisted in *The Heiress* by producer **Brian Plescher**, stage manager **Jason Foreman** and assist. stage manager **Kendra Patch**.



Daughter Catherine (Celeste Coburn) assists her father, Dr. Sloper (Darwin Miller), to his bedroom.

The cast includes: Playhouse newcomer and longtime Houston theatrical talent **Darwin Miller** as Dr. Sloper; **Celeste Coburn** (most recently seen as the Coachman in *Pinocchio*) is Catherine Sloper; established Players favorite **Judith Laird** (*Rose's Dilemma*, *Blithe Spirit*, *Inspecting Carol* and many more) as meddling Aunt Lavinia Penniman; her sister, the fashionable Elizabeth Almond is played by Playhouse newcomer **Rana Haddad**; **Miranda Plescher** is the frivolous Marian Almond; Playhouse returnee **David McCullars** (last seen as the cross-dressing lead in *Leading Ladies*) as Morris Townsend; **Kate Conroy** (dating back to the Greenhouse days with Players) as Maria, the maid; Playhouse returnee **Rebecca Smootz** (formerly Rebecca Stokinger) (last appearing as the ditsy roller-skating blond in *Leading Ladies*) as Mrs. Montgomery; and another Playhouse newcomer **Tyson Davis** is the banker Arthur Townsend.

The costume designer, an important part of any period play, is **Bert Flanagan** of Costumed Occasions in San Marcos. **Penny Graves** an experienced interior designer and owner of Gate House Designs in Wimberley is the set decorator, while **Bill Peeler**, a master lighting designer with many Playhouse productions in his portfolio, will add all of the wonderful nuances of light and shadow in a nineteenth century home.

The play runs from February 18 – March 13. Evening performances are Friday and Saturday nights at 8 p.m., Sunday matinees are at 2:30 p.m. Tickets are \$18 each (\$20 each opening night including a pre-show reception at 7 p.m.) and may be purchased at any time on-line at www.wimberleyplayers.org. The Box Office is open prior to each performance weekend during the following days and hours: Wednesday & Thursday, 2 - 5 p.m., Fridays 2 - 6 p.m., Call 847-0575 and leave message.



*Come see **The Heiress** at the Playhouse...you can bet that Carolyn Finklehoffe will see it*

Perhaps the name Finklehoffe rings a bell? **Carolyn's** husband **Fred F. Finklehoffe** wrote, directed, and produced many plays, television shows, and films during his lifetime. One of the plays he produced was *The Heiress* at The Biltmore Theater on Broadway. Carolyn said that when Fred was producing *The Heiress*, he and director Jed Harris went to London to talk to Wendy Hiller about performing the leading role. Fred had told Carolyn that they would not have done the show if they could not have Wendy.

Carolyn Finklehoffe resides with her daughter **Casey** and son-in-law **Don Marinucci** on their Texas Hill Country ranch. Don has shown and won in Western Pleasure for years, often competing in Texas, which is what spurred the big move for him and Casey. Four years ago, Carolyn said farewell to her home in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, and joined Casey & Don on the ranch.

Carolyn and Fred met at a private screening party given by Mickey Rooney in New York City. Rooney and Fred were good friends and frequently worked together on films. Carolyn worked as a fashion model, so an invitation from Rooney was run of the mill for the young woman who spent evenings out with the likes of Frank Sinatra. Carolyn said that when she arrived at the party, she saw Fred. At first sight, she knew that Fred would be the man she would marry.

Carolyn and Fred's wedding was held at the home of Judy Garland. Her daughter, Liza Minnelli, was Carolyn's flower girl. Judy Garland later became Casey's godmother. Many of the shows Fred wrote were specifically for Miss Garland, and she was a dear friend of the Finklehoffe's. Carolyn and Fred's wedding was covered by Louella Parsons of the Associated Press, thus their wedding picture and write up appeared in papers nationwide.

Carolyn related stories of Fred's writing life. He wrote his first play, *Brother Rat*, with fellow Virginia Military Institute Cadet John Monks Jr., as his senior thesis. A VMI professor told Fred and Johnny that he hoped to see *Brother Rat* on Broadway someday. Fred went on to Yale Law School. After he graduated with his Juris Doctorate, he and Johnny reacquainted and rekindled their flame for *Brother Rat*. They spent a summer refining the play and seeking a producer. George Abbott took them on, and *Brother Rat* became a big hit, sparking Fred's career.

Fred was under contract with MGM for fifteen years, where he wrote for Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney. Fred's writing career gained fame with such films as *For Me and My Gal*, *Strike Up the Band*, and *Meet Me in St. Louis*, which was nominated for an academy award. Carolyn shared that when Fred wrote, he would spend time at his desk, where he would write all day. He would complete an entire screenplay, longhand on yellow legal paper, in two weeks

Carolyn remembers that Fred was best known for his writing, and especially for his dialogue, "His forte was dialogue between people." Casey and Carolyn expressed their excitement at coming to see *The Heiress* on opening night, February 18.



*Carolyn proudly displays the show poster from the 1947 production of **The Heiress**. Also proudly displayed behind her is a portrait of her late husband Fred and was painted by Carolyn's mother.*



Where is Robert and what have you done with him?

Question, do you consider yourself an actor? Those intense blue eyes looked away as if trying to remember something....long pause,then he made eye contact and said, “Just an actor? Well..., I also play the piano.” And the beat goes on.

Robert Scott FitzGerald is an actor, director, set carpenter, teacher, night auditor at a Holiday Inn, a salesman who sold group subscriptions for the Intiman Theatre in Seattle, the grounds keeper at Manressa Castle Hotel, a handy man for some eccentric lady on cliff’s edge of Port Townsend, and in town, with the Water Street Players, did “a little acting and a little piano playing.”

He was born in San Antonio and his father was a fighter pilot in Korea so he moved around a lot.... Virginia, Okinawa, Sacramento, Bangkok, etc.; landed at Concordia College in Minnesota where he experienced his first real acting, directing, and a variety of other behind the scenes jobs. Doing summer stock at the university got him hooked.

He later connected with a company called Shakespeare in the Park and this time the set was on a flatbed truck doing what else but Shakespeare. This lasted for two seasons until he went back to doing kids-work at the Music Theatre for Young People where he was The Giant, in *Jack and The Beanstalk* for one memorable semester. Robert then went on tour with a children’s theatre group, the Robin Hood Players, and did as many as three plays a day using “fold out portable sets.” Robert traveled a lot auditioning for parts and odd jobs as the set carpenter and understudy for *The Angry Housewives*, directing *Inherit the Wind* and playing the role of the Reporter at the same time.

While visiting his uncle in California, he says his car actually “drove him to the Pasadena Playhouse.” He walked up to the Playhouse manager and said, “I am an actor and I would like to audition.” He was asked for a resumé and had to go next door and find a place to sit down and write one. The manager said it was his first ever handwritten resumé. However, he was hired and worked at the Playhouse for 10 years and at the Ribet Academy teaching elementary kids about theatre. Obviously no one has to ask what their mascot was.

All of this experience he brought to us when he moved to Dripping Springs and auditioned for *Inspecting Carol* and played the piano in 1940’s *Radio Hour* last year. Our own **Judith Laird** asked him to direct *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and she was also looking for a director for *Pinocchio*. Guess which one he chose? Robert loves working with kids and *Pinocchio* was lovely and funny and charming .

The audience never stopped laughing. Now he is getting to show his more serious side as the director of our next production, *The Heiress*, which opens February 18th. As far as I remember, there is not one child in any scene. Your emotions will run the gamut and you will be thoroughly entertained .

It should be no surprise that with all this talent and experience in our midst, the Board has just named Robert Scott FitzGerald as the new artistic director. We are so privileged to have him. Aren’t you glad you live in Wimberley?



Robert likes to get right in the middle of the scene when he’s directing and coaching as shown above in *Pinocchio* with Beverly Evans and below in *The Heiress* with Celeste Coburn and Darwin Miller.



Written by Judith Driscoll



There's always a good time for Players' members and now is a good time to renew your membership.



Members had good time at annual meeting



Betty...where have you been.



I am s-o-o happy to be here!



I did not eat all of the brownies.



...by the light of the silvery moon.



Yes...it is my To Go box.

Sunday, January 16, found one hundred plus members gathered at the Playhouse for their annual meeting and a State of the Players presentation. The evening began with a bit of wine and revelry as individuals renewed their membership and visited with friends as shown in this photo gallery. At 6:30 p.m. the members present were entertained with a concert by **Gypsy Moon**, which soothed their souls and excited their senses as **Linda Sriro, Ray Sriro** and **George Prado** strummed their instruments to a blend of Gypsy virtuosity and American jazz.

A slide presentation replayed memories of past productions and amused the audience with the Players financial status accompanied to the tune of "Money Makes the World Go Round." Retiring members **Jane Dunham, Dell Hood, Judith Laird** and **Jana White** were honored with a round of applause, while **Robert FitzGerald** and **Carl Galante** were elected unanimously as new Board members for a two year term. A new amendment to the current Bylaws was passed which stated that the minimum number of board members would be dropped from seventeen to eleven.

The 2011 WP Board consists of thirteen members: **Lynn Adelson**-Past President; **Kay Allison**-President; **John Beck**-Executive Secretary; **Jonna Beck**-PR Team; **Charlotte Caldwell**-VP PR & Marketing; **Sharon Drobeck**-Treasurer; **Robert FitzGerald**-Artistic Director; **Carl Galante**-Artistic Team; **Michael Iles**-VP Administration; **Darlene Kukla**-Box Office Manager; **Gina McClure**-VP Membership & Volunteers; **Suzanne McCord**-Development Team; and Ex-Officio Board Member, **Adam Witko**-Executive Producer; **Paul Wright**-VP Development.

The evening ended with a delicious feast prepared by **Linda Allen**, desserts baked by **Vivian McDonald**, more wine, more laughter and many smiles.

If you haven't already done so...it's not too late to renew your membership! There's a membership application in every Playbill, or you may join on-line at www.wimberleyplayers.org <<http://www.wimberleyplayers.org/>> . Just click on "Membership." You may also call the box Office at 847-0575 and request that a membership form be sent to you.



Blue becomes you.



Great meeting!



Come on Dad...it won't kill you to smile.



I'm pouring as fast as I can.



Oh, Donna...Oh, Donna.

Having a good time reading Curtain Call? In order to continue receiving your issue of Curtain Call, it is important that we receive your 2011 dues by April 15. Thanks for your support! Your dues help keep the lights turned on and the water running in the Playhouse! Thank you.