

2006 Looks Good For Alexandria Theater

Both professional and community theaters offer interesting shows this year.

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From left, Richard Isaacs as Skip Hampton, David Seemiller as Lonnie Roy McNeil, Bernard Engel as L.D. Alexander, and George Campbell as Red Grover in "The Last Meeting of the Knights of the White Magnolias," which opens at the Port City Playhouse Jan. 20.

As Alexandria's theater groups get back up to speed after the holiday break, it is time for theater lovers to start planning their samplings of the local offerings. Alexandria is home to a number of valued theater companies, both professional and community, and the shows thus far announced for this year are varied and impressive.

The Little Theatre of Alexandria launches its 2006 offerings this weekend with a production of a very funny and intellectually challenging comedy by none other than Steve Martin. Known mostly as the "wild and crazy guy" of his "Saturday Night Live," performing persona, Martin is also an accomplished playwright who can sink his teeth into a theatrical concept with panache. His "Picasso at the Lapin Agile" finds Pablo Picasso debating concepts of art and science with Albert Einstein over a glass of wine. The Little Theatre's season also includes a Broadway musical based on an unfinished story by Charles Dickens. "The Mystery of Edwin Drood" has the audience vote on an ending. Later, Frank Pasqualino will direct a comedy about roommates who file their taxes as a married couple, "Love, Sex and the IRS." In June, Joe Schubert directs Noel Coward's charming comedy "Blithe Spirit," and Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine's summer musical "Into the Woods," has been scheduled.

Port City Playhouse, which now performs in the Lee Center on Jefferson Street, waits until the following weekend to kick things off, but they have a fine performance to begin the year. The playhouse will mount one of the plays in Preston Jones' Texas Trilogy — "The Last Meeting of the Knights of the White Magnolias." Later they take up Dana Son's drama, "Stop Kiss" a story about two women who get a violent reaction from onlookers who see them kiss in public. In June, Donald Neal will direct Tennessee Williams' play "Summer & Smoke," the story of a minister's daughter and a hell-raising boy in small town Mississippi.

Another local company that performs at the Lee Center is Tapestry Theatre, now in its 10th season. In February they open Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet," which will be directed by Peggy Jones. In May the stage adaptation of Ray Bradbury's "Fahrenheit 451," will be presented and followed during the summer by an adaptation of Louisa May Alcott's "Little Women."

The Aldersgate Church Community Theatre has a number of shows worthy of anticipation on its 2006 plate. In March they tackle George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart's 1939 comedy "The Man Who Came to Dinner," and their summer musical will be Cole Porter's tuneful romp "Anything Goes." In the fall, they mount John Van Druten's comedy involving a staid businessman and a free-spirited witch which was a popular 1950's movie with Kim Novak and Jimmy Stewart, "Bell, Book and Candle."

Alexandria is also home to two professional theater companies. Natural Theatricals was launched last summer, offering productions with a classical influence in the lovely amphitheater inside the George Washington Masonic Memorial. The schedule for 2006 has yet to be announced. MetroStage, on the other hand, is active and has announced the first two shows for 2006 in their relatively new home on North Royal Street. The first show opens next week. Both shows are musicals. On the Jan. 18 they open the premiere of a musical by Thomas W. Jones II, William Hubbard and J.D. and Javetta Steele titled "Two Queens, One Castle." It will feature gospel, R&B, jazz, and pop music. In April MetroStage will present "Becoming George," a new musical based on the life of radical feminist writer George Sand.

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