



Thursday, January 3, 2002

## Meadow Brook Theatre play opens Jan. 9

Classic monster movies and penny-dreadful novels combine with modern theatre and a ridiculous plot to create "The Mystery of Irma Vep," which runs Jan. 9 through Feb. 3 at **Meadow Brook Theatre**.

The popular spoof is a send-up of Penny Dreadfuls – a theatrical form popular in Victorian England – and gothic movies like "Rebecca" and "Wuthering Heights" as well as campy horror movies with mummies, werewolves and the like. Many of the play's followers attempt to identify as many film and literary references as possible during the show, which is no easy task, with all the hidden references and double entendres.

In the tradition of a Mel Brooks movie or a Monty Python skit, all subjects monstrous and hilarious are fair game when two actors play eight roles in a blur of costumes and genders. The talented and versatile actors play an Egyptologist with a new bride, a housekeeper with a wooden leg, an Egyptian princess dead hundreds of years, a ghostly intruder, a mummy, a werewolf and a Twilight Zone full of other surprises.

With a cast of two, the third star of the show may be Velcro. The patented fastening material enables speedy costume changes, evoking laughter and sometimes applause as the actors assume new characters, sexes and even species.

"The Mystery of Irma Vep" premiered in 1984 at playwright Charles Ludlam's Ridiculous Theatre Company in New York. The play starred Ludlam and partner Everett Quinton. After playing more than 300 performances in New York City, the show enjoyed a revival in 1998 off-Broadway and in theatres across the world. Preferring to keep the show in a live theatre setting, Ludlam turned down advances from television and movie producers.

"The endless appeal of the show comes from the humor that is on so many different levels," said Michael Haney, director of the **Meadow Brook Theatre** production. "There is something for everyone. From physical comedy, to double entendres, slapstick, and vaudeville, this has more laughs per minute than anything I have ever been involved with."

An accomplished director and actor, Haney has directed numerous productions at the Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, including the recent production of "The Mystery of Irma Vep" with the two actors who are starring in the Meadow Brook Theatre version. Haney's productions twice have received Cincinnati Entertainment awards. His directorial credits also include productions at the Sacramento Theatre Company and the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. He was artistic director at the Allenberry Playhouse in Pennsylvania from 1993-1996.

Starring in the **Meadow Brook Theatre** production are Greg McFadden and Remi Sanders.

McFadden trained at Juilliard and has acted in various New York theatres, including The Actor's Company Theatre, Kennedy Center and at numerous regional theatres. Audiences may recognize his distinctive voice, which was featured in NPR's "Titanic: The Unsinkable Myth."

Sanders played opposite McFadden in a previous Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park show, where Haney and others observed that their chemistry was perfect for the production of "The Mystery of Irma Vep." His acting credits also include many roles at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, California Shakespeare Festival and American Conservatory Theatre.

Sound designer Tony Vaillancourt of Waterford Township helps to make sure the setting of the production is truly eerie. He is the technical adviser to the theatre program at Waterford Schools. Trained in practical theatre at Mercy College, Vaillancourt was sound designer and technician at Meadow Brook Theatre from 1984-88.

Tickets for "The Mystery of Irma Vep" and **Meadow Brook Theatre** 2001-2002 series subscriptions are on sale at the **Meadow Brook Theatre** Box Office by calling (248) 377-3300. New this season are couples nights discounts on Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday evenings, which offer couples a special "buy one ticket – get a second ticket at half price" deal. Group tickets are available by calling (248) 370-3316.

### SUMMARY

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