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Romance, comedy at mellerdrama

By Cheryl Kisling

Will Charlotte, the naive owner and operator of the Bar-B-Q-Dude Ranch, ever admit her love for the Spanish speaking ranch hand who is allergic to horses?

Can Joe Chuckwagon ever buy his wife Princess One-Blossom the "101 Ways to Fix Rattlesnakes Cookbook"?

These and many more questions can be answered by seeing the Theatre Incorporated of Lincoln mellerdrama production, *They Went That-A-Way*.

Director Tom Lombard, who also plays Waxine's sidekick Slug, said there will be performances every Wednesday through Saturday until Sept. 8 at the upper level of the Starship Enterprise.

The play opens with Charlotte and her pessimistic partner, Lil Bower, putting the finishing touches on their newly-acquired dude ranch. The girls are from, "about as far south as you can get—Cortland."

They soon are informed by Sheriff Jackson that they need a license to operate their ranch.

Recognizing the financial woes of the young ladies, the sheriff agrees to let them have a couple days to pay for the license.

The girls are talked into hiring a ranch hand who makes a life of freeloading, and into hiring an imitation Indian's wife as a cook.

Elmira Spring, the ranch's first paying customer, arrives, and gives hope that the ranch will make it through the financial crisis. Then the imitation Indian is hired, and two "big-time outlaws" arrive with a shoe box full of money.

The shoe box is left downstairs, and the sheriff tells the girls it is stolen. As several visitors come to the ranch, romantic twists are added to the plot.

A marriage falls through, and it turns out that all the cook can cook is rattle snakes.

If all of this isn't enough, the actors provoke, almost challenge the audience to heckle, cheer and throw popcorn because "that's half the fun of a mellerdrama." And this one is complete, from the live piano player to the Master of Ceremonies, Jerry Egan, leading the audience in a sing-along at intermission.

According to Muffley, this is the last production for TIL this year since they only perform during the summer. Muffley said that they have been asked to work the entire year, but says that it is impossible without the nucleus of people.

Backgrounds of the actors vary from a college freshman majoring in theatre and journalism, to a woman in her late 30s wanting to get involved, to an aspiring 18-year old hoping to be accepted into a prominent New York acting school.

Renay Kushner, who plays Waxine, said that she has always been surrounded by acting.

"My mother is an actress and so was her mother," the 4-foot-9 blonde Kushner said. "It's been a part of me all of my life."

Preparing to go on stage five nights a week for the next four weeks might put a strain on some actors, but the cast said they are ready.

Doug Grandstaff, alias Freddy Buck, said, "Getting into character isn't hard for me. I just don't worry about it."

The rest of the cast includes Ann Smeltzer as Charlotte Pelham, Gerianne Carttar as Lil Bower, Mark Burkitt as Sheriff Jackson, Lane Burkitt as Joe Chuckwagon, Dottie Stoesz as Princess One-Blossom, Annette Dahl as Elmira Spring and Sara Williamson as Sue Castle.

Curious about the outcome of the Bar-B-Q-Dude Ranch? Then see "They Went That-A-Way" and find out who's really falling for whom.



Photo by Mark Billingley
Renay Kushner and Tom Lombard as Waxine and Slug.

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