Baldwin Players to Perform in Musical March 6-8

TIFTON—Returning to the musical genre has been a goal for Baldwin Players’ Director Brian Ray for a long time. On March 6-8, his theatre troupe at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College puts his plan into action when it stages “Smoke on the Mountain” at 7 p.m. each night on the Wiregrass Opry stage at the Georgia Museum of Agriculture (GMA) and Historic Village.

“Since taking over the Baldwin Players in 2012, I have been trying to select plays that would serve two functions,” Ray said. “I wanted to provide the students working on the plays a
chance to learn about theatre, performing, and themselves, and be engaging and entertaining for the audience, especially the community audience in Tifton.

“I really wanted to get local people interested in theatre at ABAC, so I chose shows that they would have some familiarity with and would find entertaining.”

Those are the reasons that the Baldwin Players and the ABAC music program will team up to perform Connie Ray and Alan Bailey’s off-Broadway musical “Smoke on the Mountain” at the GMA’s outdoor venue. Tickets are free to faculty, staff, and students with ABAC ID. The general public can purchase tickets at the door for $7.

Ray had initially planned to do a comedy each fall semester and a drama in the spring semesters. However, since the Baldwin Players performed Shakespeare’s “The Taming of the Shrew” in the fall, it was a challenge to figure out the next production.

“I knew that a musical would be educational, entertaining, and it would top Shakespeare,” Ray said. “ABAC hadn’t had a musical in a long time, and I have a soft spot in my heart for musicals. I love being in them, and the audiences love to see them. So, despite never having directed one before, I decided to bring a musical to ABAC’s stage.”

The venue of the GMA had a huge role in how “Smoke on the Mountain” was selected for the spring production. The usual location, Howard Auditorium, was booked on the production dates chosen by Ray so he had to look elsewhere for a performance space.

“The GMA seemed like a great location,” said Ray. “When I thought of plays that would work out there, I hit on the idea of doing a musical that I had been a part of many years ago. ‘Smoke on the Mountain’ has a great performance history, and it ran off-Broadway for several
years. It is widely performed, and many people in Tifton have heard of it, even if not having already seen it.”

The play’s rural, rustic setting of the 1930s made the play a perfect fit for the GMA. Ray then approached Dr. Susan Roe, head of the music program at ABAC. She agreed that a small musical with both a country and gospel theme would be a great pairing for Tifton, the students of ABAC, and the GMA.

“I guarantee that the audience will have a great time,” Ray said. “They’ll stomp their feet and clap their hands to the music and leave the show singing the songs.”

Ray said he still laughs out loud every night in rehearsals and taps his feet to the songs as the actors get them ready to perform. There’s a laugh a minute and just about as many songs, ranging from old-time gospel hymns to bluegrass and country tunes.

For more information on “Smoke on the Mountain,” interested persons can contact Ray at (229) 391-4969 or via e-mail at bray@abac.edu.

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