

Stage Right to open Jones, Hope and Wooten comedy Friday

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By Peggie Miller / Performing arts columnist

As it has done several times, Stage Right of Texas presents another Jones, Hope and Wooten comedy “The Dixie Swim Club” that opens its season this Friday in downtown Conroe’s Crighton Theatre.

“This is an unusual vehicle from these playwrights,” director Amber Babcock said. “It is hilariously funny, yet poignant, tender, and with great depth. This all female cast is extraordinary. Each one plays a totally different character than they ever have before. It’s rewarding, but challenging for them, and they have come shining through.”

The comedy centers around five women who were members of a college swim team and have remained friends. They meet annually on a weekend in the same beach house in North Carolina to catch up, free of family and other responsibilities.

All are in different periods of life. One is a former nun who left her convent under unfavorable circumstances; one is a “sex pot;” another is what the director described as having an unsavory existence, and another is a cynical attorney whose whole life is her law practice.

Director Amber Babcock used a clever strategy to insure that each cast member grasped the person she is portraying. Amber requested that actors write imaginary biographies of their characters.

“It was rather eerie,” cast member Carolyn Wong said. “We did not share bios with each other, yet so many similarities were revealed that it became evident how these characters would have remained friends for so long — they have common bonds. I love character work. It really pays off, and audiences will see that as well.”



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The witty humor relays the women's situations in the way for which the authors are known. Wooten wrote for long running "The Golden Girls," now in late night reruns. The trio is recognized for its collaboration on numerous other manuscripts that include "Mama Won't Fly," "The Red Velvet Cake War" and "Christmas Belles" all of which SR has previously presented.

The "Dixie Swim Club" cast consists of Amy Sowers, Melody Montez, Jennifer Marshall, Leona Hoegsberg, and Wong.

"There's a rare chemistry between them," Amber said. "They are professional, supportive and harmonious. In all my experience, I've seen this kind of totally positive spirit only three times. It's extraordinary."

When she moved here a year ago Director Babcock brought credentials of her own. She estimates that she has participated in a hundred stage productions in Chicago, New York, Texas, San Francisco, Jakarta and other exotic locales. Her previous experience was all from musicals with her stage career beginning when she was 12 years old. She regularly sang with the Chicago Lyric Chorus.

Terry Lynn Hale, well known among Owen Theatre audiences, is running lights for this one in the Crighton.

"It's so funny she said. "I have laughed and I have cried, sometimes during the same scene."

Don Hampton, another Owen Theatre stalwart, created and helped build this Stage Right set. At an Aug. 2 gala Hampton won the Players' Montie Award for best set that he conceived for "Bus Stop" in the Owen Theatre last season.

"The Dixie Swim Club" runs weekends Sept. 5-21 in the Crighton Theatre. Tickets cost \$20 or less and may be purchased at 936-441-7469 or www.stageright.org.

Stage Right holds auditions for its Christmas comedy "The Best Christmas Pageant Ever" on Sept. 14 & 15 at 7 p.m. in the Crighton Theatre, 234 North Main St. Brenda Storseth directs as she did for "Arsenic and Old lace" last season. She also directed the Conroe Theatre Camp show this summer.

It's about the Herdsman children, little terrors who become involved in Sunday School when they discover that refreshments are served, which influences them to go after more goodies that might come with being in the church Christmas pageant.

Certain havoc seems destined as the little urchins create one calamity after another; but perhaps it will end well with a generous helping of Christmas spirit. But that's not a sure thing.