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MINER BASKETBALL FEBRUARY CALENDAR

MEN'S

02/04 v UAB
02/08 v Tulsa
02/11 v Tulane
02/22 v Southern Miss
02/29 v Rice

WOMEN'S

02/09 v Marshall
02/12 v Tulane
02/23 v SMU
02/26 v Rice

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utepathletics.com

World premiere at UTEP crafted by world-class creator Sir Tim Rice

Few El Pasoans can say they've been a part of a theater world premiere, but the cast of "Lute!" at UTEP Dinner Theater can say that. They can also say they got to work with one of the preeminent musical theater creators, Sir Tim Rice.

It all began back in 1977 when a young Greg Taylor wrote Rice a fan letter after hearing the original "Evita" album, and Rice wrote back. That began a long friendship and collaboration that continues with "Lute!" a rewriting of the musical "Blondel" that had its American premiere also at the dinner theater in 1985.

"When I was in England last year, Tim was telling me about projects he was working on then and in the future when he mentioned that he still wanted to re-write "Blondel" and put a push on it to get it into schools and amateur groups in UK and USA," said Taylor, director of the dinner theater and this new production. "I told him that we had been waiting years to do the show again because he kept saying he was going to re-write, so I suggested to him that he actually do the re-write and that we would do a production so he could see how it plays. He agreed, and that is how we got to present the world premiere of "LUTE."

Rice changed the name because many people, including himself, kept mispronouncing the original name.

"The lead character's name, Blondel, should rhyme with 'fondle,' as in caress, and does not rhyme with 'Shondell' as in a member of Tommy James' popular singing combo of the 1960s," Rice explained in a letter he wrote to Taylor to help promote the new production.

Rice said he had long wanted to rewrite parts of the show he wasn't satisfied with, but his workload (notably for Disney), then the death of the original music writer, Steven Oliver, in 1992, stymied his efforts until 2006, when he did some rewriting for a new professional production at the Pleasance Theatre, London. He still wasn't satisfied – then Taylor made his offer.

"For this UTEP production, I have also enlisted the help of the composer and arranger Mathew Pritchard, who, for new scenes, has added a melody or two of his own to the mix, very much in the style of the late, great Stephen. Mathew worked on the 2006 version and achieved wonders with a very small musical line-up," Rice said. "Here he has much more to play with and has been an enormous help to me in the latest restructuring of the piece."

"Lute" takes place in 1189 England and features as its characters, King Richard the Lionheart (played by Troy Taylor), the evil Prince John (played once again by Greg Taylor), a confused Assassin (Jorge Ollivier), three be-bop-

STAGE TALK



by Carol Viescas

ping Monks (John Guevara, Taelon Stonechipher, Allen Thompson), the put-upon Fiona (Betsey Tinajero), and of course the minstrel Blondel (Ricardo Parra), who plucks his lute all over Europe searching for his king while trying to write the biggest hit song of the '80s (the 1180s, that is). Oh, and there's the backup group, the Blondettes: Tanisha Lewis, Sylvia Prieto and Davida Washer.

"The show features witty lyrics, beautiful music and an extremely funny story that had our audiences laughing the whole way through," Taylor said. "If you attended our 25th anniversary concert (in 2008) you may remember the songs 'Running Back for More,' 'The Monks Introduction' and 'No Rhyme for Richard.'

Both Rice and Pritchard have been to El Paso to see rehearsals and work with the actors.

"Tim was in ... for a few days to see where we were and to see how the new stuff played on stage," Taylor said. "He was pleased with most of it but rewrote several things while he was here including a whole new song in one day for the Duke character. Also, Mathew Pritchard (who is doing the new orchestrations and vocal arrangements as well as the music for the new songs) is here through opening, working on changes we need and working by phone and email with new changes Tim sends every day."

Of course, any show presents challenges, but Taylor found out the biggest challenge was himself.

"I played Prince John in both of our original productions, so I am constantly singing old lyrics and saying old lines that no longer exist," Taylor said. "The rest of the cast does not have this problem because it is all new to them."

The cast, he said, has responded extremely well to all the new changes thrown at them.

"It really is just like working on a new show as we get rewrites and new songs and new music daily. This is something new for all of us. It has been a challenge but a whole lot of fun. The fact that we are working with a multi-Academy, Tony and Grammy award winning Knight of the Realm makes it that much more special," Taylor said.

Carol Viescas is a veteran of community theater and teaches journalism at Bel Air High School.

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