



Radio Play Channels Nostalgia & Happy Times for the Start of the Holiday Season

December 8, 2018

by Pat Rogers

Listening to Podcasts and books on tape have experienced a steep rise in popularity in recent years. Fans have discovered stories can compel by spoken word alone, without the companion of visuals. The idea is not a new one, as history relays, as people used to gather around radios to hear the latest news, music and stories broadcast through Radio Shows.

Director Michael Disher has combined the essence of listening to stories told with musical theater in the production “Meet Me in St. Louis: A Live Radio Play,” currently in its final weekend on the stage of the Southampton Cultural Center. Performances are held on Saturday, December 8, 2018 at 7 p.m. and on Sunday at 2:30 p.m. Tickets are \$25 for adults and \$12 for children under 21 years old. The performance is the Long Island premiere and only the second performance in the State of New York.

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Pamela Morris, Catherine Maloney, Michael Casper, Alyssa Kelly, Anna Schiavoni and Joey Giovingo sing the opening number, “Meet Me in St. Louis” at the Southampton Cultural Center. Photo by Dane DuPuis. Courtesy Southampton Cultural Center.

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The production channels the experience of what it was like to be a part of the audience of a Radio Play broadcast while also witnessing the “behind the scenes” making of the radio program with aspects of a musical woven through the incorporation of dance and choreography.

The integration of audience participation mimics the way historic studio audiences helped bring spoken stories alive to radio listeners by hearing audience reactions—whether spontaneous or coached by flashing signs, Disher said in a phone interview.

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Lon Shomer, Michael Lyn Schepps and Joey Giovingo sing the well-known “Trolley Song.” Photo: Dane DuPuis, Courtesy of Southampton Cultural Center.

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For the Southampton production, the Live Radio Play audience experience begins as people walk into the Southampton Cultural Center and are greeted by the sweet smell of fresh-baked cookies to begin the transport from 2018 to 1903. At the time, the city of St. Louis waited for the advent of the very first World Fair to arrive in 1904. The time was one of optimism, excitement and simple pleasures. It was also a time of innocence as the first world war hadn't yet unfolded, Disher explained.

After taking a seat in the theater, the integration of the Radio Play experience continues when signs flash from the stage to signal "Applause," "On the Air" and when the program returns from commercial breaks and to begin the show. All of these details help to recreate 1903 and the stories (and commercials) that captivated popular audiences of the day.

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Michael Lyn Schepps, Alyssa Kelly and Anna Schiavoni performing 1940's harmonies in "Meet me in St. Louis - A Live Radio Play". Photo: Dane DuPuis. Courtesy of Southampton Cultural Center.

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The story itself is a classic MGM romantic musical comedy that tells the tale of four sisters (including one played by Judy Garland) as they learn about the ways of the world and love with the "boy next door." Produced by MGM in glorious Technicolor, love does conquer all with plenty of song, dance and costumes to contribute to the light-hearted adventure.

"Meet Me in St. Louis: A Live Radio Play" is based on a book for theater written by award-winning playwright Hugh Wheeler and adapted into a Radio Play by contemporary playwright Joe Landry. Wheeler was working on a musical adaptation of "Meet Me in St. Louis" at the time of his death in 1987. His previous musicals- A Little Night Music," "Sweeney Todd" and "Candide"—had won Tony Awards."

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Pamela Morris and John Lovett performing in "Meet me in St. Louis". Photo: Dane DuPuis. Courtesy of Southampton Cultural Center.

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Joe Landry is known for his adaptations of theater into Radio Plays. At the Southampton Cultural Center, Disher has produced Landry's Live Radio Plays of "It's a Wonderful Life" and "War of the Worlds." Popular with a Hamptons audience, Disher decided that "Meet Me in St. Louis" would be a

perfect addition to welcome this holiday season.

Landry's "Radio Play" recreates a 1946 radio station that is telling the story set in 1903. The core includes such classics as The Boy Next Door, The Trolley Song and Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas.

"The time is so innocent; it's before World War I," Disher said. "St. Louis is about to receive a great gift—the World's Fair. This was huge for them."



Michael Lyn Schepps sings "You'll Hear a Bell." Photo: Dane DuPuis. Courtesy of Southampton Cultural Center.

The timing of presenting this play now offers a bit of escapism for contemporary audiences and a chance to enjoy the simple pleasure of a story well told and music enlivened by dance and actors that enjoy the production.

"It's a charming little story that allows audiences to feel really good for nearly two hours," Disher said. "There are some beautiful songs and the story is terrific."



Commercial break: Listerine with John Lovett. Photo: Dane DuPuis. Courtesy of Southampton Cultural Center.

The Southampton production is under the direction of Michael Disher, Alyssa Kelly choreographs and Amanda Jones musically directs.



Pamela Morris sings about "The Boy Next Door" in "Meet Me in St. Louis." Photo: Dane DuPuis. Courtesy of Southampton Cultural Center.

BASIC FACTS: General Admission [Tickets](#) are \$25. Southampton Cultural Center is located at 25

Pond Ln, Southampton, NY 11968. www.scc-arts.org.

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