

BANGOR DAILY NEWS

Ten Bucks Theatre provides epic escape from winter doldrums

By Emily Burnham, BDN Staff

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The unrelenting onslaught of snow, rain, ice and slush that has pummeled Maine over the past six weeks tends to dampen spirits a bit. One of the best cures for the winter doldrums is a good laugh — and Ten Bucks Theatre Company has you covered in that department.

Ten Bucks' newest show, "Epic Proportions," opening 7 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 10, at the Eddington-Clifton Civic Center, is a rip-roaring farce of, well, epic proportions. Set in the 1930s, it tells the story of two brothers, Benny and Phil (played by Gavin Pickering and Greg Mihalik), who are cast as extras in a Hollywood biblical epic titled "Exeunt Omnes." The movie begins to burst apart at the scenes, and over the course of the play much hilarity ensues.

"It's very slapsticky, very silly, very goofy. There's a lot of wordplay, and a lot of just entertaining, fun stuff," said director Arthur Morison, a Ten Bucks regular and a veteran of stages all over eastern Maine. "We try to do something funny every winter, just to make people stop thinking about snow and give them something fun to do on the weekend."

Morison himself has a long history with the play. Larry Coen, along with eventual "Friends" TV series co-creator David Crane, wrote the play in the mid-1980s. Morison has known Coen since they both lived in the Midwest in the early '80s, and when "Epic Proportions" had its first Boston staging back in 1985, Morison performed in the show.

"I knew that someday I wanted to do this play again, and this happened to be the time. It was also the time that I had to step up and direct, which is kind of unusual for me," said Morison, best known as an actor in numerous Ten Bucks and Penobscot Theatre shows.

The friction between brothers Benny and Phil begins to develop as Phil is cast as an extra in scenes involving parades and feasts, while Benny is cast only in the scenes that involved the 10 plagues of Egypt. While all this is going on, both brothers fall in love with casting director Louise (Brianne Beck), and other cast members ratchet up the insanity.

"There's gladiators, there's Egyptians, there's 500 different scenes from the Bible and the ancient world," said Morison. "It's got it all."

“Epic Proportions” is the third play to be staged by Ten Bucks at Eddington-Clifton Civic Center, a restored grange hall on Route 9. Bangor-area theatergoers may not realize that it is a great place to see both theater and music performances, with its cozy, intimate interior space and old-fashioned clapboard exterior.

“People say, ‘Oh jeez, Eddington!’ like it’s in Michigan or something,” said Morison. “It’s nine miles from Bangor. It’s 10 minutes from downtown Brewer, and it’s so worth the trip. It’s a great space.”

As for the cabin fever reliever aspect of “Epic Proportions,” it’s in keeping with previous Ten Bucks February-March shows, which have included several productions of “Fawlty Towers” and “Monty Python” scripts and sketches.

“Next year, I’m thinking some ‘Black Adder’ scripts will be in the running,” said Morison, referring to the British comedy TV series starring Rowan Atkinson. “We try to balance our Anglophile fans with our American comedy fans. We’re hoping to get butts in seats, and to keep the buzz going for other Ten Bucks productions this year. We’ve got lots more planned.”

“Epic Proportions” will be staged at Eddington-Clifton Civic Center at 7 p.m. Feb. 10, 11, 12, 17, 18 and 19, and at 2 p.m. Feb. 13 and 20. Tickets are \$10. For information, visit www.tenbuckstheatre.org.

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