

## Ghostlight Strives for Increased Presence

Written by Jeff Ignatius  
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Ghostlight Theatre's production of the Sam Shepard play *True West* – running the next two weekends at the Holzworth Performing Arts Center at Davenport North High School – will mark the end of the organization's days as an enigma, putting on shows periodically but infrequently and without any discernible pattern.

To mark its 10th anniversary, Ghostlight is embarking on its "first fully professional season," said Melissa Coulter, the group's full-time artistic director. Yes, that's right: The notoriously unpredictable company has hired a full-time artistic director. And it's got a four-show schedule set for its 2004-5 season.

"We're trying to become a little more of a community presence," said Dave Mahl, Ghostlight's board president and the director of *True West*. "We want to be a permanent presence." In the past, Ghostlight has put on shows it wanted to do when it wanted to do them, and as a result, audiences are "never sure when we're going to do a show," Mahl said.

That much has certainly changed, and the upcoming season certainly looks interesting. Two shows – *A Christmas Carol* and *Will Rogers Follies* – will likely have broad appeal, while the other two – a musical version of *Gilligan's Island* and a Steve Martin adaptation called *The Underpants* – look to be a little less traditional. (Martin's play is based on an obscure work from 1911, while *Gilligan's Island* is exactly what you'd imagine.)

Ghostlight's campaign to be more visible in the Quad Cities got a boost this week when it received a \$20,000 grant from the Riverboat Development Authority to support its new professionalism. The group starts a subscription drive for its next season on June 1, with the target of 5,000 subscribers for the year, Coulter said. Ghostlight will also host some sing-alongs at the Brew & View, starting with *The Wizard of Oz* on June 17 and 19.

While *True West* isn't part of the 10th-anniversary season, it could be considered a coming-out party. The play, starring Tom Brooke and Reid Robinson, has been a dream project of Mahl's for a long time. "This has been one that's been on the back burner for three years," he said. He knew he wanted Brooke and Robinson to play disparate brothers who switch personalities and sibling roles over the course of the play, but the schedules never worked out.

Brooke plays Austin, a successful Hollywood screenwriter, while Robinson is his ne'er-do-well brother Lee. Austin envies his brother's relationship with their father, while Lee is jealous of Austin's success. When Lee enlists his brother's help with a screenplay, their respective fortunes change dramatically.

Mahl is full of praise for both Shepard's script and the two lead actors. The director compared Shepard to Shakespeare, in the sense that a poor or average treatment is acceptable because of the script, while great performances add depth and entirely different interpretations; there's a lot of room for actors to work, he said. *True West* can be played as a black comedy, but this

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production will most likely mine the script's dark and disturbing elements.

And Mahl thinks that Robinson and Brooke bring a lot to *True West*. "They have been acting for 20 years apiece," he said. "Everything they do comes across as very *true*

. It literally becomes just a conversation between the two."

*Adult tickets for True West are \$10 and can be purchased at the door or by calling (563)441-4849. Performances are at 7:30 p.m. May 21, 22, 28, and 29.*

### 2004-5 Ghostlight Season

The Underpants, September 9-19 at North High School

A Christmas Carol, November 26-December 5 at Capitol Theatre

Gilligan's Island: The Musical, March 3-13 at Capitol Theatre

Will Rogers Follies, July 21-31 at North High School