

Written by Mike Schulz

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“Most of our students work jobs when they’re not at school,” says Scott Community College (SCC) theatre instructor Steve Flanigin. “So when you say, ‘We’re going to do a play – who’d be interested?’, you have to see who’s available before you decide what play you can *do*. Because if they have to go to a job when we normally rehearse – Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, from three to five – then they can’t do the show.

“I think that’s one of the challenges of doing theatre at a community college that a lot of people don’t realize,” he continues. “What we do depends on who is here in the fall or the spring, and what their schedules are like. I mean, I’d love to do *Hello, Dolly!*, but not with four people.”

Happily for Flanigin, he was able to secure roughly a dozen student participants for the school’s latest production. And while that number wasn’t large enough for a *Hello, Dolly!*, it was perfectly appropriate for the show that he and fellow SCC instructor John Turner did choose: a new adaptation of author H.G. Wells’ alien-invasion classic

War of the Worlds

, running October 20 through 30.

Written by Turner and directed by Flanigin, this particular *War of the Worlds* owes as much to Orson Welles’ famed Mercury Theatre presentation as it does to H.G. Wells’ science-fiction novel. Set in 1967, the show re-creates the familiar tale of, as Turner phrases it, “Earth being

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invaded by disgusting-looking creatures from Mars," with SCC's student actors portraying the show's military officers, frightened civilians, and members of the press.

Taking its inspiration from the notorious broadcast that shocked America on October 30, 1938, Turner's and Flanigin's offering is being performed as a radio presentation during a time period that Turner calls "the very last gasp of the golden age of radio." Beyond the prelude and finale that establish this production as a play *within* a play, SCC's *War of the Worlds* will find its cast members delivering a radio-drama take on Wells' (and Welles') tale, emoting into microphones with scripts still in hand. And the decision to present this sort of "reader's theatre" version of the material, as Flanigin explains, was also partly dictated by the student talent available.

"Some of them are really new to theatre," he says, "so we figured we could take the stigma of memorizing lines away from some of these actors. That whole thing of, 'Oh my God, I've got to learn all these *pages* ... !'"

"A lot of them have really good reading voices," says Turner of the cast, "but to ask them to memorize hundreds of lines would maybe scare them too much. They could do it, but they would *think* they couldn't do it."

While this fall presentation is being newly written for SCC's current crop of students ("We've been through four versions since last Wednesday" says Turner during our September 28 interview), Flanigin and Turner actually produced a different *War of the Worlds* for the school back in 1998, one written and staged as a radio-program rehearsal of the Wells classic. "But this time," says Turner, "we thought, 'Why don't we do it like it's an actual show? Like we're really on the air?'"

"The first one was set in 1998," he continues, "but Steve suggested the '60s for this one, and I really liked that idea. Starting in the early '70s, radio began to be more talk-oriented and less entertainment-oriented. But in '67, radio was still much more varied."

The Last Gasp of the Golden Age of Radio: Scott Community College Presents a New Version of "War of t

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