

Written by Mike Schulz  
Tuesday, 19 June 2012 06:01

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Local audiences have seen married actors Jonathan and Rochelle Schrader appearing opposite one another numerous times over the years: in Opera@Augustana's *The Pirates of Penzance* and

*The Mikado*

; in the former Green Room Theatre's

*Into the Woods*

; and in Quad City Music Guild's

*Babes in Toyland*

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But with Countryside Community Theatre's presentation of *The King & I*, running June 22 through 30 at Eldridge's North Scott High School, patrons will see the Schraders interact in a way that, on-stage at least, they never have before.

"This is the first time we've actually gotten to play semi-romantically together," says Jonathan, who enacts the titular, short-tempered King of Siam – a role made legendary by Yul Brynner – opposite his wife's stalwart schoolteacher Anna. "I've played her father several times, and I tried to kill her in *Babes in Toyland*, but ... ."

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It's important, though, to stress the "semi" in that "semi-romantically," because as fans of Rodgers & Hammerstein's beloved musical know, the characters' tentative courtship is hardly a smooth one – a point discovered early by the Schraders' five-year-old son, and *King & I* castmate, Caleb.

"At one point in rehearsal," says Rochelle, "we [Jonathan and I] were at each other's throats ... ."

"It was the first time we did the second act," continues Jonathan, "and when I yelled at her, Caleb just stopped me and said, 'Why are you *saying* those things?' And I said, 'You have to remember that that wasn't daddy. That was the king, and the king was yelling at Anna. Daddy wasn't yelling at mom.'"

Sharing a laugh with her husband, Rochelle adds, "This is Caleb's first show, and so that was hard for him to understand."



It's easy, however, to understand these gifted, Rock Island-based singers/actors landing such sought-after roles, considering Rochelle's area experience includes playing Marian (the librarian) in Countryside's presentation of *The Music Man*, and Jonathan's includes the grass-skirt-and-coconut-bra-wearing Luther Billis in the organization's

*South Pacific*

. Still, as the Schraders explain it, their participation in *The King & I* was something of an accident.

"We auditioned in January," says Jonathan, "and we didn't get cast."

Laughing, Rochelle continues, "You know, sometimes directors have different people in mind for roles ... ."

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“And I don’t look like the Yul Brynner type at *all*, so ... .”

But then, in the spring, the show’s original director backed out of the production due to a scheduling conflict, and prior to new director David Turley’s recruitment, “the leads dropped out, too,” says Jonathan. “We don’t know why. But that’s when the [Countryside] board of directors called us – with about a week-and-a-half, two weeks before rehearsals started – to see if we were available. And we were.”

Yet what they weren’t, despite their many musical credits, was truly familiar with the *King & I* material, which features such show-tune standards as “Getting to Know You,” “Hello, Young Lovers,” and “Shall We Dance?”

“I’d never seen it staged,” says Rochelle. “I had seen the movie, but it wasn’t something I knew extremely well. People know them by heart, but I had to *learn* the songs.”

“And I saw the movie in high school,” continues Jonathan, “and that was it. So when the board called us, we pulled it out and watched it – even though I don’t usually do that. I like to form my own opinions about a character.”

“But we watched it, like, *once*, and it got Caleb really excited about it,” Rochelle says.

Laughing, Jonathan says, “The easiest way to learn is to watch the movie!”

“He said that to us when we were practicing our lines!” adds Rochelle. “And we were like, ‘*No-o-o* ... we’re not watching the movie again.’ You want audiences to get the show they want to see, but you don’t want to copy what someone else has already done. It really does, truly, have to come from you – you make your choices, and if directors don’t like the choices you make, they’ll let you know.”

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