

*Henslowe: Nothing. Strangely enough, it all turns out well.*

*Fennyman: How?*

*Henslowe: I don't know. It's a mystery.*



The venerable Andrew Lloyd Webber/Tim Rice musical was slated to herald the rebirth of local

*Elaine: You should be fair to these plays.*

*Mortimer: Are these plays fair to me?*

It's 1941 in Brooklyn, New York and Mortimer Brewster is a man with issues. First off he hates the theater, which is a real problem considering he's theater critic for a big time New York newspaper. His faithful, long-suffering girlfriend has an itchy ring finger and a one track mind for matrimony. His two brothers are no picnic, either. One believes he's Teddy Roosevelt, blows a bugle and bellows "Charge!" each time he races up the staircase (San Juan Hill). He's digging the Panama Canal in the basement. Fugitive older brother Jonathan has just turned up on the doorstep on the lam with a new face – courtesy of his creepy companion, Dr. Einstein – and an affinity for homicide. Oh yes, and Mortimer's just discovered that his dear, sweet old aunties' favorite "charity" is poisoning lonely old men who come looking for a room. Indeed, poor Mr. Hoskins has recently been stuffed into the window seat for safekeeping until Teddy can take him "down to the lochs." In short, the Brewsters of Brooklyn are a mixed bag of nuts. "I probably should have told you this before," Mortimer explains to Elaine, "but you see insanity runs in my family. It practically gallops."



And that's the fun in Joseph Kesselring's classic American farce, *Arsenic and Old Lace* running November 20

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at the USCB Performing Arts Center. While insanity may gallop through the Brewster clan like Attila's Huns, Kesselring's dialogue fairly crackles in the rapid-fire style of the era. The production also marks the return of community theater to the Beaufort area for the first time in nearly a decade with the debut of The Beaufort Theatre Company, a project of Beaufort Performing Arts, Inc. "BPA provides the funding, and in partnership with USCB, the venue to make the production possible," says BPA Executive Director Bonnie Hargrove. "The whole idea it to encourage locals to come and participate without the stress of trying to raise money for costumes, royalties, and production costs."

"It's exciting that there's going to be theater in Beaufort again," observes Dave Falls. According to Evans, Falls was simply "born to play Teddy." "It's been such a long time," he says. "We've needed it." Falls is a veteran of "lots" of local groups, among them Beaufort Little Theater and Jon Sharpe's Beaufort Reparatory Company, the latter having passed beyond legend into the realm of the mythological. "Yes," Falls confirms with a laugh, "that might be the

better word to describe it.”



Performance space has always been at a premium in the area and the biggest challenge to building local sustainable theater. In fact, Beaufort Little Theater’s eventual demise came after post 9/11 security issues barred the company from the space they were using on the grounds of the Naval Hospital. Under the umbrella of the BPA and through its partnership with the university, the fledgling company has no such worries and hit the boards for rehearsals on the main stage of the Performing Arts Center three weeks before the opening curtain. According to Falls that’s an unprecedented luxury for a non-university production and could signal a new era for local theater. “I’m hoping that it’ll take off again, and I think it will,” he says.

*“From the start it has been the theatre's business to entertain people ... it needs no other passport than fun.”*

-□□□□□□ Bertolt Brecht



January 1941. New Yorkers are looking for some entertainment – a distraction from the grim events in Europe and the looming reality of a second world war. On January 10, Broadway delivers just what the doctor ordered as the curtain rises on Joseph Kesselring’s comedy *Arsenic and Old Lace*.

The play is an unlikely smash with audiences and critics alike packing the house for 1,444 performances. Blitz-weary Britons eager for a diversion from the war developed a taste for *Arsenic*

as well, and the show duplicated its New York success in London a year later. Legendary film director Frank Capra hired Julius and Philip Epstein, the writers of *Casablanca*

, to give Kesselring’s play the silver screen treatment.

The classic film, released in 1944, solidified Cary Grant’s status as both a box office sensation and a gifted comedic actor in the roll of Mortimer Brewster.

