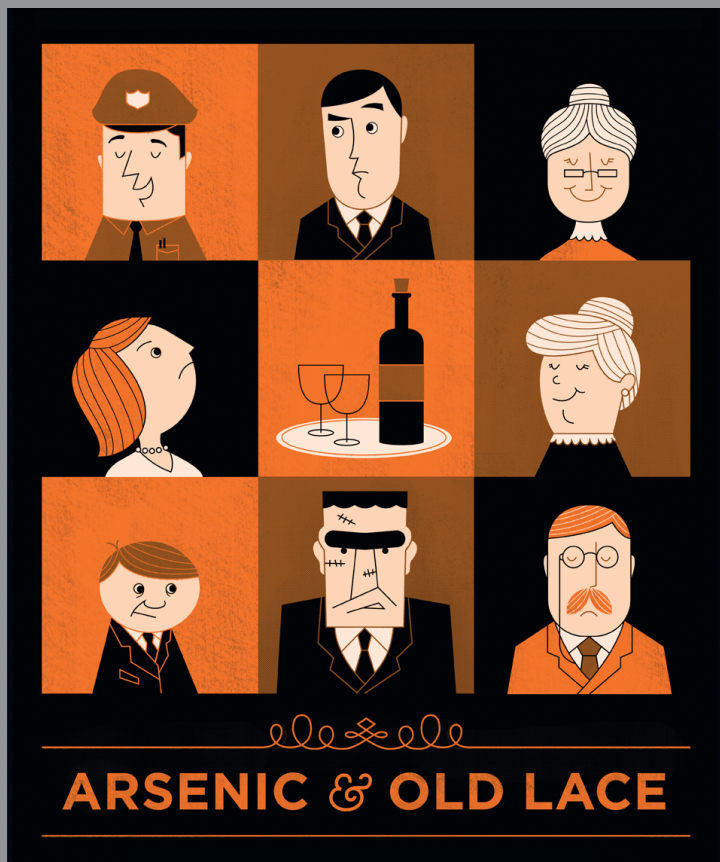


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Actors Guild of Parkersburg Presents

Arsenic and Old Lace

by Joseph Kesselring

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Synopsis & Scenes

It is 1941 and the Brewster family has lived in their Victorian home in Brooklyn, NY for many years. Currently the matronly sisters, Abby and Martha, share the home with their nephew, Teddy. Mortimer, another nephew, frequents the home and is dating the minister's daughter who lives next door with her father. As the story progresses we find out that this well-respected family has some very dark secrets. We also meet the third nephew who has returned with his traveling companion, Dr. Einstein (not that one). The reunion is not a happy one to say the least.

Surprisingly, these events lead to some very comical moments that have kept audiences laughing for many years. This dark comedy has lasted for decades because inside all of us lives a little morbid aunt who smiles while she serves the elderberry wine.

Setting: The living room of the Brewster home in Brooklyn., 1941.

Act One

An afternoon in September

Act Two

That same night

Act Three

Scene 1: Later that night

Scene 2: Early the next morning

There will be two ten-minute intermissions.

You are invited to meet the cast in the green room following the performance.

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Cast

Abby Brewster.....TARA KNIFFIN POLAN
 The Rev. Dr. Harper/Lt. Rooney.....CHARLES L MATTHEWS
 Teddy Brewster.....KERMIT POLAN
 Officer Brophy.....CHARLES ROBERTS
 Officer Klein.....SCOTT FIELDS
 Martha Brewster.....BETTY DOTSON
 Elaine Harper.....MORGAN LEIGH STUBBE
 Mortimer Brewster.....R. J. LOWE
 Mr. Gibbs/Mr. Witherspoon.....DAVE WARNER
 Jonathan Brewster.....BILL KNOTTS
 Dr. Einstein.....CHUCK WILCOX
 Officer O'Hara.....ELI TRACEWELL

Staff & Crew

Director.....DAVE PRATHER
 Assistant Director.....CHARLES MATTHEWS
 Production Assistant.....NORA CORRA
 Technical Director.....ROD ODEN
 Advisor.....JEAN NEWTON
 Costume Designer.....VERONICA FIELDS
 Lighting Designer.....SABRINA DYE
 Stage Manager.....EMMA PEARSON
 Assistant Stage Manager.....MIRANDA RICHARDS
 Lighting Designer.....SABRINA DYE
 Sound Technician.....EMMA PEARSON
 Props Mistress.....MARY CATHERINE AUGSTKALNS
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 Playbill Layout and Design.....BRETT MEADE



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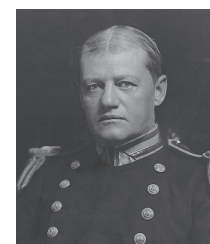
A Letter from the President



IF YOU HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE our production of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, then you were treated not only to a fine performance, but also a look at our new lights. We are so pleased to be able to add to the spectacle of our theater with this upgrade, and we are so happy to be able to share that with you. We were able to acquire funding from the Parkersburg Area Community Foundation to make this happen, and we are pleased as elderberry wine.

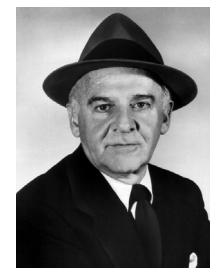
Yes, this is the start of the new season here at the Actors Guild of Parkersburg, and our first offering is *Arsenic and Old Lace*, a classic dark comedy with laughs in the most unexpected places. Here I am as both the president of the organization and the director of this show to let you in on a few cultural references you might miss.

FIGHTING BOB EVANS: Robley Dunglison Evans (18 August 1846 – 3 January 1912) held numerous important sea commands during the 1890s. He won great acclaim for his firm and skillful handling of a tense situation with Chile, becoming known as “Fighting Bob” Evans.



EVANS

WINCHELL: Walter Winchell (April 7, 1897 – February 20, 1972) was an American newspaper and radio gossip commentator.



WINCHELL

PUBLISH THE BANNS: The banns of marriage, commonly known simply as the “banns” or “bans”, are the public announcement in a Christian parish church of an impending marriage between two specified persons.

PIRANDELLO: Luigi Pirandello (28 June 1867 – 10 December 1936) was an Italian dramatist, novelist, poet and short story writer. He was awarded the 1934 Nobel Prize in Literature for his “bold and brilliant renovation of the drama and the stage”.



PIRANDELLO


STRINGBERG: Johan August Strindberg (22 January 1849 – 14 May 1912) was a Swedish playwright, novelist, poet, essayist and painter. His renown is mostly as a playwright. A bold experimenter and iconoclast throughout,

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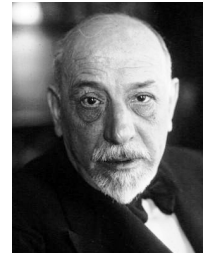
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he explored a wide range of dramatic methods and purposes, from naturalistic tragedy, monodrama, and history plays, to his anticipations of expressionist and surrealist dramatic techniques.

HELLZAPOPPIN': Hellzapoppin' is a lively musical revue written by the comedy team of John "Ole" Olsen and Harold "Chic" Johnson, with music and lyrics by Sammy Fain and Charles Tobias. The revue was a hit, running for over three years, and was at the time the longest-running Broadway musical, with 1,404 performances, making it one of only three plays to run more than 500 performances in the 1930s.

JUDITH ANDERSON: Dame Judith Anderson (10 February 1897 – 3 January 1992) was an Australian actress who had a successful career in stage, film and television. She won two Emmy Awards and a Tony Award and was also nominated for a Grammy Award and an Academy Award. She was well-known for her roles as sinister-looking housekeepers dressed in black.

As you watch the show, see how these references come into play. There are more to be discovered, and if you don't already know them, perhaps you can use a modern reference (the internet) to find them.

Welcome to the Guild, and welcome to our crazy family. You are going to fall in love with characters, despite some of their fatal quirks. Do you dare try the elderberry wine?

David B. Prather

DAVE PRATHER

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About the Playwright

JOSEPH OTTO KESSELRING WAS BORN IN NEW YORK CITY on June 21, 1902. His career was always linked in some way to the theatre. At the age of twenty, he began teaching music and directing amateur theatre productions at Bethel College in Newton, Kansas; at twenty-three, he left academia to pursue acting, writing short stories, and producing vaudeville plays; and at thirty-one—one year after his marriage to Charlotte Elsheimer—he devoted himself to writing, continuing to pen short stories and initiating his career as a playwright.



Between 1933 and his death in 1967, he authored twelve plays—mostly light comedies. His first play to be produced, *Aggie Appleby, Maker of Men*, premiered in 1933, and four later plays were produced on Broadway: *There's Wisdom in Women* (1935), *Arsenic and Old Lace* (1941), *Four Twelves Are 48* (1951), and *Mother of That Wisdom* (1963).

Only one of Kesselring's efforts met with any real success with critics and audiences. When *Arsenic and Old Lace* premiered on Broadway in 1941, theatre critic Brooks Atkinson was frankly surprised by the quality of the script: "Nothing in Mr. Kesselring's record has prepared us for the humor and ingenuity of *Arsenic and Old Lace*." He wrote *There's Wisdom in Women* in 1935 and *Cross Town* in 1937. But his murder drama is compact with plot and comic situation. The lines are bright. The story is mad and unhackneyed.

"Although the scene is always on the verge of macabre and the atmosphere is horribly ominous, Mr. Kesselring does not have to stoop to clutching hands, pistol shots or lethal screams to get his effects. He has written a murder play as legitimate as farce-comedy" —The New York Times.

Arsenic and Old Lace was wildly successful, receiving almost universal praise. This absurdly gruesome yet gloriously funny comedy ran in New York for 1,444 performances and in London for 1,337—the longest in the British capital for any American play.

The Herald Tribune called it "the most riotously hilarious comedy of the season," and the Sun's critic protested, "you wouldn't believe homicidal mania could be so funny."

Regardless of the reasons for the play's success, *Arsenic and Old Lace* remains dear to the hearts (and funnybones) of modern audiences. It has become Kesselring's legacy, with its film incarnation and numerous stage revivals around the world.

Things you probably didn't know about *Arsenic and Old Lace*

FRANK CAPRA'S 1944 FILM version of *Arsenic and Old Lace*, released 71 years ago, is one of the most beloved and popular comedies from Hollywood's Golden Era.

But it wasn't a laughing matter to Cary Grant, who long maintained he gave his "worst performance" as a Broadway drama critic who flips out when he learns his sweet old aunts in Brooklyn have been poisoning boarders.

"*Arsenic and Old Lace* made him shudder," the screen icon's daughter Jennifer Grant wrote in a memoir. "Why? It's a hilarious, sweet, mad-cap, thoroughly memorable movie," she said to him. "Egads, all the overwrought double takes, all the gags... I'm way over the top," he replied.

Jennifer adds, "It worked beautifully."

Here are some other things you may not have known about *Arsenic and Old Lace* — the movie and the original stage version:

The movie had to wait its turn.

The film was shot in Hollywood in late 1941 but didn't premiere until Sept. 1, 1944, at New York's old Strand Theatre. The delay resulted because Warner Bros. agreed to a demand by the play's producers, Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, that the film not open until their highly popular play completed its Broadway run.

The Broadway version was too good for its own good.

The main draw on Broadway was Boris Karloff as the critic's homicidal brother, who is described as looking "like Boris Karloff" because of botched plastic surgery.

Much to Karloff's chagrin, the producers insisted that he remain on Broadway while Josephine Hull and Jean Adair, as the aunts, and John Alexander, as their brother who thinks he's Teddy Roosevelt, reprised their roles in the movie.

Legal preparations had to be made.

Director Capra insisted that Raymond Massey, who has Karloff's part in the movie, be made up to look like Karloff. Warner Bros.' legal depart-

ment was so concerned that Karloff would sue over the likeness that they urged the studio to get him to sign a release. He did, at least partly because he was an investor in the play, and thus stood to make a lot of money from the movie version, which turned out to be even more popular than the play.

Scenes of NY were added.

Like the play, most of the action in the movie takes place in the aunts' home and in a churchyard just outside. Twin brothers Julius and Philip Epstein added brief scenes set at a Brooklyn Dodgers baseball game in Ebbets Field and at the marriage bureau in Manhattan, as well as a sequence deleted from the final movie in the aunts' basement where the bodies are buried.

The ending got a switch-up.

The original ending of Joseph Kesselring's play — the aunts poisoning a man who's taking them

to a sanitarium — was changed in the film at the insistence of Hollywood censors, who also wouldn't let Grant's character say, "I'm a bastard!"

It brought old friends together again.

Arsenic and Old Lace was a reunion between Grant and character actress Jean Adair, who had nursed him back to health when he contracted rheumatic fever during a theatrical tour 20 years earlier.

Grant almost didn't have the part.

Grant wasn't the first choice for the film, but Bob Hope wasn't available because of a schedule conflict (Capra needed to shoot the film just before reporting for WWII military duty).

Grant, who donated his entire \$100,000 salary to wartime charities, insisted, "Jimmy Stewart would have been much better [than me] in the film." Stewart later starred opposite Josephine Hull in *Harvey* — for which she won an Oscar for Best Supporting Actress.

An auteur filled Karloff's shoes.

When Karloff left to head up a road company of *Arsenic and Old Lace*, he was replaced on Broadway by Erich von Stroheim. Karloff's rival, Bela Lugosi, played the part for five weeks onstage in Los Angeles.

Our men in arms got a special performance.

Karloff reprised his role for an audience of GIs in the South Pacific during the war. He also appeared in TV productions in 1955 (with Orson Bean in Grant's role) and 1962 (opposite Tony Randall). Three months after Karloff's death in 1969, Fred Gwynne of *The Munsters* played the role in a TV film with Bob Crane, Lillian Gish and Helen Hayes.

The show has been brought back to life over the years.

Abe Vigoda and Tony Roberts starred in the most recent Broadway revival, in 1986. Michael Richards of *Seinfeld* played the Karloff role in a London revival in 2003.

A planned remake never happened.

Richard Pryor was announced for the Cary Grant role in a film remake of *Arsenic and Old Lace* in the late 1970s. It never happened.



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Who's Who in the Cast & Crew

BETTY DOTSON (Martha Brewster) is excited to return to the Guild stage! Usually a "behind-the-scenes" person, she was assistant director for *Young Frankenstein*, *The Civil War*, *Joseph...Dreamcoat*, *Into the Woods*, and *White Christmas*. Other jobs include running the sound board, stage managing, and assisting in the costume shop. Having appeared in over twenty shows, some of her favorite roles on stage have been Guinevere (*Camelot*), Sarah (*Guys and Dolls*), Nancy (*Oliver!*), and Lizzie (*Baby*). She was honored to have participated in the 40th and 50th Anniversary shows for the Guild and looks forward to our 60th in November!

SCOTT FIELDS (Officer Klein) first stripped his way onto the stage in *Legends* and has loved theater since that time. Scotty would like to thank his family of thespians, bikers, and blood for making his world beautiful. "I love you all!"

BILL KNOTTS (Jonathan Brewster) has been involved with the Actors Guild since 1982 and has occupied every position except director. Nineteen years ago, Bill was fortunate enough to be cast as Mortimer Brewster in *Arsenic and Old Lace* in the Guild production that opened September 20, 1996. Now, nineteen years later, he will attempt to fill the over-sized "Frankenstein" boots of Boris Karloff, a childhood idol, who originated the role of Jonathan Brewster on the Broadway stage in 1941. In June 2014, Bill retired after thirty-four long, arduous years from Public Debt. He hopes you ENJOY this American theatre classic!

R.J. LOWE (Mortimer Brewster) first appeared on stage in 1986. In the almost thirty years since he has appeared in seventy-four shows (forty-eight at the Guild, eight at MOV, four in college, fourteen professionally), directed ten (seven at the Guild, one at MOV, one in college, one professionally), and worked various backstage duties in countless others. Later this season he directs *Legally Blonde*. R.J. is the proud recipient of Best Actor Award from AACT (Multi-State Regional), many Outstanding Achievement Awards from OCTA (State Level), and three MOV Khalil Awards. He graduated from AMDA in New York City. "For my mother!"

CHARLES L. MATTHEWS (The Rev. Dr. Harper/Lieutenant Rooney/Assistant Director) has been active in the Guild for many years having served in both administrative and artistic capacities. Having participated in well over one hundred productions, his memorable directing experiences include *Big River*, *Man of La Mancha*, *The Civil War*, *Into the Woods*, *The Elephant Man*, *Children of a Lesser God*, *Streetcar Named Desire*, *Noises Off*, *Lombardi*, *Moonlight and Magnolias*, and the award winning *Tuesdays with Morris*. Memorable acting experiences include *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *A Few Good Men*, *Noises Off*, 1776, *Moon over Buffalo*, and *A Walk in the Woods*.

TARA KNIFFIN POLAN (Abby Brewster) is thrilled to be on the Actors Guild stage for the second time this year. Earlier in the season she appeared as Violet Weston in *August, Osage County*. She is excited to be a part of this show and a member of

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this terrific cast. Tara has appeared in numerous shows over the past ten years and always thanks her husband and four daughters for their support and encouragement.

KERMIT POLAN (Teddy Brewster) is making his first appearance on the AGP stage. He started his stage career in 2005 as a roustabout in MOVP's production of *Carnival*. He has kept busy both on and off stage ever since, most recently providing sound design/operator for *Steel Magnolias*. His recent onstage performances are MOVP's *Leaving Iowa*, *The Pink Panther Strikes Again!*, and as Brad in the Khalil Award winning *Everybody Loves Opal*. He wants to thank his wife, Tara, for insisting he audition for *Carnival* and for putting up with him.

CHARLES ROBERTS (Officer Brophy) has worked in advertising sales at Results Radio for over eighteen years. His acting career began with *Spoon River* his senior year in high school, over twenty-five years ago at Parkersburg South. Since then, he has been in over twenty-nine plays, including *West Side Story* at WVU-P, *The Ghost of Christmas Past* at Fairmont State College and then his first performance at the Guild as Corporal Dawson in *A Few Good Men* and had the leading male role in the last play *Alone Together*.

MORGAN LEIGH STUBBE (Elaine Harper) is thrilled to be on the Guild stage again. Her credits include *Shrek the Musical* (Shoemaker's Elf, Duloc Dancer, Dancing Rat), *White Christmas* (Judy Haynes), *It's the Reel Thing*, *Nunsense* (Sister Mary Leo) and *Cotton Patch Gospel*. Morgan has played Reba Freitag in *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, Catherine in *Pippin*, and

multiple roles in both *Violet* and *Working* at Wilmington College. She has been in several local commercials and is the current Mrs. West Virginia United States. Morgan is delightfully married to Todd and wants to thank him for his incredible support.

ELI TRACEWELL (Officer O'Hara) recently appeared on the Guild stage as Huckleberry Finn in this summer's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and as Tobias in *Sweeney Todd*. He has also appeared in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Unexpected Guest* and *James and the Giant Peach* at WVUP and *Zombie Prom*, *Harvey*, *The Wizard of Oz*, and *Footloose* at Parkersburg South.

DAVE WARNER (Mr. Gibbs/Mr. Witherspoon) is retired and lives on his farm in Meigs County, Ohio. The farm is his hobby along with over thirty years of community theater. He's been on stage in several Guild productions.

CHUCK WILCOX (Dr. Einstein) is making his return appearance at the Guild after an absence of fifteen years. In his Actors Guild debut in 1996, he also played Dr. Einstein, making it the only role he has ever reprised. Chuck also played Barry in the 1997 Guild production of *Boys Next Door* which won several SETC and OCTA awards. Chuck has been performing in the Florida Tampa Bay/St Pete area. He has worked the Tampa Performing Arts Center, Gorilla Theater, Hat Trick Theater, and the Early Bird Theater. Chuck would like to thank his mother for all her continued support.

DAVE PRATHER (Director) is a long-time member of the Guild, appear-

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ing in several shows. He received Khalil awards for his performances in *Honk! (The Cat)*, *Chicago! (The Jury)*, *The Diary of Anne Frank* (Otto Frank), and *The Boys Next Door* (Lucien P. Smith). He has directed several shows, including *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Paint Your Wagon*, *Leading Ladies*, and *August, Osage County*. He appears in the movies *Christ Complex* and *White Zombie*. Dave studied acting at the National Shakespeare Conservatory and writing at Warren Wilson College.

ROD ODEN (Technical Director) is proud to continue being the Guild's resident Technical Director and designer. Rod's most recent works include *Les Miserables*, *Young Frankenstein*, *August: Osage County*, *Sweeney Todd* and *Moonlight and Magnolias*. Rod is proud to continue the reputation of excellence at the Guild, all the while developing the technical departments and encourage volunteerism. Rod wishes to express his undying thanks to his wife, Raquel, and four beautiful children.

THE CAST



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DOTSON



SCOTT
FIELDS



BILL
KNOTTS



R.J.
LOWE



CHARLES
MATTHEWS



KERMIT
POLAN



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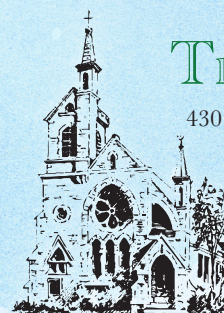
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“Actors are agents of change.

A film, a piece of theater,
a piece of music, or a book
can make a difference.

It can change the world.”

—ALAN RICKMAN



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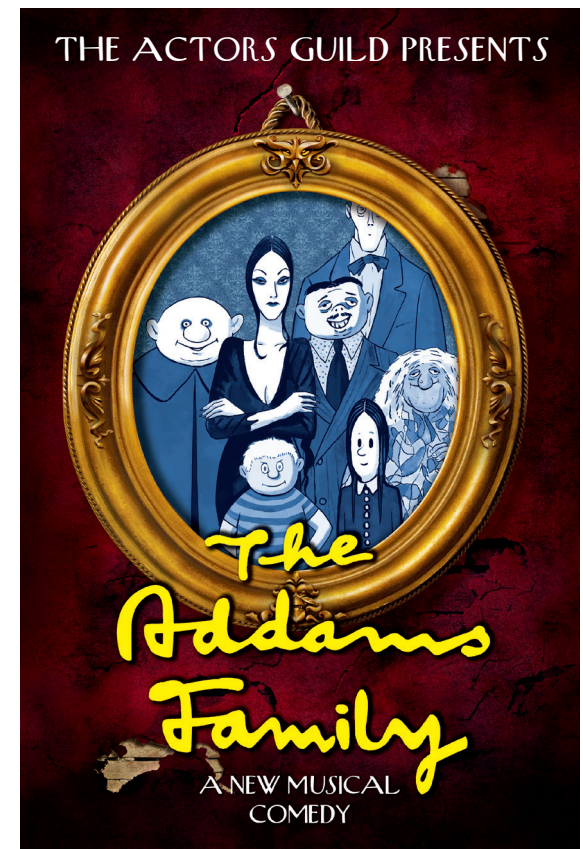
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Opening in October

THAT LOVABLE FAMILY of creepy kooks is alive and well and living in their super-spooky mansion in Central Park. The Addams family, led by the elegantly gaunt and seemingly undead Morticia and her ever-devoted husband Gomez, is in turmoil. Their daughter Wednesday, now 18, finds herself falling in love—a sensation that is unsettling for both her and her family of endearing misfits. When the teen invites her new boyfriend, Lucas Beineke, over with his “normal” family to get better acquainted with the Addams household, comic chaos (including everything from mixed-up potions to a scorching tango) ensues.

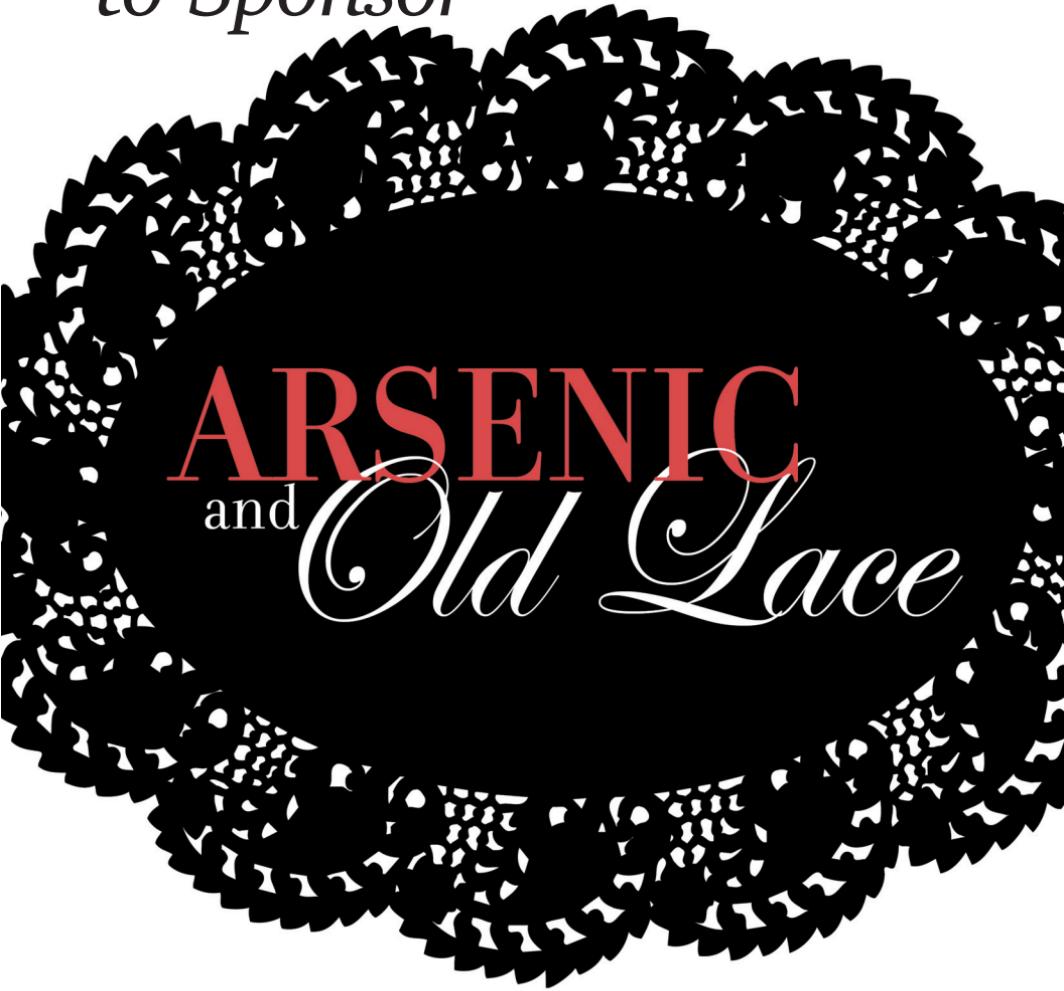
Fans of Charles Addams’ macabre cartoons and the popular TV show and movies they inspired will not be disappointed by this musical. The original story and score may be new to audiences, but the iconic characters, including Lurch, Grandmama, Pugsley and Uncle Fester, remain. In addition to singing and dancing, this Ad-

dams Family is different from other incarnations of the altogether ooky clan: Wednesday, now coming of age, is no longer simply a pig-tailed lass with a penchant for (literally) torturing her brother, and Morticia has morphed from the picture of cool confidence to a woman faced with her own mortality—and all the anxiety (and perhaps comfort) that entails.



OCT. 30, 31, NOV. 6, 7, 13, 14 AT 8 PM
NOVEMBER 8 AT 2:30 PM

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