



Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CSU Professor

Headlines for

Covina Center for the Performing Arts

(August 26, 2009): In a new production at the Covina Center for the Performing Arts, *Steel Magnolias*, the acclaimed biographic memoir of Southern womanhood by Robert Harling, will feature Eve Himmelheber as M'Lynn, the steely mother whose goal is to protect her diabetic daughter, Shelby from the dangers that her marriage and pregnancy may inflict.. Himmelheber, a theatre veteran who is also a professor of theatre at Cal State University Fullerton, makes her CCPA debut as M'Lynn.

M'Lynn's daughter, Shelby, the beautiful and strong-willed diabetic who will not allow her mother to control her life and her decisions, will be played by Amie Bjorklund. Bjorklund earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts in musical theatre at Cal State University Fullerton. The professor and her student, who have worked together only once before, in a college production of *Pajama Game*, are looking forward to working together as peers, not teacher and student. They laughed and said, "We don't scare each other"

When casting the play, the director, C. Mack Gilliland, was unaware that the two had been affiliated through their college, but he had them read together and was immediately struck by the chemistry that existed between the two. Only after having cast the two women did he learn of their connection. And to round off a cast full of coincidences, in October, when Amie will be missing from the cast of *Steel Magnolias* for two performances as she runs a marathon with the organization she founded, "Acting Like Marathoners" to benefit the National Hospice Foundation, the part of Shelby will be played by Lila Bassior, another Cal State University, Fullerton graduate.

Beginning her sixth year teaching at California State University at Fullerton, Himmelheber's original love was acting in drama and comedy. But she discovered a love for singing when she was encouraged to audition for *Cabaret* at Fullerton College and has loved musical theatre ever since. She "was bitten by the bug" and has performed regularly in productions that showcase her singing. In fact, the CCPA production of *Steel Magnolias* is the first straight dramatic role she has played in a very long time.

After graduating, Himmelheber spent time teaching at Cypress College, Iowa State University and University of Arizona, but eventually came back to CSU Fullerton. As the Coordinator of one of only three schools in California that offer a Musical Theatre BFA degree, she teaches acting, musical theatre and directing, as well as directing one or two shows a year in the main stage season at the university. With a strong resume of Shakespearean roles, which she has performed from Orange County to Fort Worth Texas, Himmelheber says that she loves Shakespeare for the “heightened language and metered text” which are the same qualities she has come to love in singing.

Amie Bjorklund knew she was a singer from a very young age, from “the beginning”, because, as she said, she “had so much feeling I have to sing.” So it was a natural fit for her to come to the musical theatre program at CSU Fullerton. After graduating from CSU, Amie joined the entertainment arm of Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines, where she sang and danced her way around the Mexican Riviera, but eventually got off the ship and headed for New York. After spending two years working in a variety of small theatres around the city, she came back to California, and has found **CCPA**. “Musical theatre is my passion,” says Amie.

These two talented women – the teacher and the pupil – have only worked together once before but sharing the experience of creating M’Lynn and Shelby for the **CCPA** production of *Steel Magnolias* has been a pleasure for both women. According to Himmelheber, working with Amie is a joy. They share “terminology, so communication is easy.” According to Amie, there is “no ego because they are looking for the backstory”, working to create characters together. And according to Eve, “Amie is very giving and focused on the work.” Amie calls Eve “brilliant.”

At Truvy’s beauty salon in Chinquapin, Louisiana, the setting of *Steel Magnolias* all the ladies who are “anybody” come to have their hair done. The local Women’s Guidance Center leader, M’Lynn, and her daughter Shelby are regulars. Played by Sally Field and Julia Roberts in the film adaptation, the play is an examination of the complicated relationship between the two. Shelby, diabetic and beautiful, struggles NOT to make her diabetes and her mother’s concern become the controlling factor in her life. That struggle drives the play over a two-year period, as the women reveal the bonds and sisterhood that emerges to support M’Lynn and Shelby’s journey through marriage, pregnancy and medical crisis.

Steel Magnolias will be performed from September 11 through October 11, at the newly refurbished Covina Center for the **Performing Arts**. Performances will be Friday and Saturday evenings beginning at 8 pm and Sunday matinees at 3 pm. All seats are \$34.00

Tickets are available by going online at www.covinacenter.com or calling the box office at (626)3318133

Contact the director to arrange interviews with the cast and for preview tickets.