

## Bentley Drama Presents 10 Plays to Honor 10th Anniversary Next Up: Sherman's Lagoon The Musical

By Andrea A. Firth



Members of the Bentley singing ensemble the Shallow Soles rehearse for the upcoming production of *Sherman's Lagoon The Musical* Photo Andrea A. Firth

To celebrate the 10th Anniversary of Bentley Upper School, drama teacher Winter Mead set the ambitious goal to produce ten plays in a single school year. With the help and support of Ahmed El-Gasseir, Chairman of the Performing Arts Department, and other members of the Drama and Music Departments, Bentley has a theater performance schedule packed with literary classics. Mead and El-Gasseir kicked off the season and treated the students to a faculty performance of Edward Albee's one-act play *The Zoo Story*. The Fall performance also included Tennessee Williams' highly charged *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, another Edward Albee play, *Three Tall Women*, and Stephen Sondheim's Broadway musical sensation (and Johnny Depp's latest movie success) *Sweeney Todd*.

For their next act, in early February, Bentley Drama will present the world premiere of *Sherman's Lagoon The Musical*. Based on the popular comic strip by Jim Toomey,

this dual-campus production will include a cast of over 30 students in 6th through 12th grades from the Oakland and Lafayette school sites. According to director and screenwriter Winter Mead, this 90-minute family-friendly show will be as entertaining to adults as it is to children.

The musical version of *Sherman's Lagoon* is populated with the familiar comic strip characters including the sharks Sherman and Megan, Fillmore the sea turtle, and Hawthorne the hermit crab. They are faced with saving their habitat from an environmental catastrophe set in motion by bad-guy Captain Quigley. The original music and lyrics written by El-Gasseir and Mead have an Afro-Caribbean feel reminiscent of the South Seas with a hint of Latin Jazz. The professionally-designed set features vibrant blues and greens and even bubbles to give the audience the sensation of being "under the sea". And, Toomey will be on hand to add his artistic touch to the

sets as his comic strip is brought to life.

Mead came to collaborate on the development of the musical adaptation of *Sherman's Lagoon* after teaching an adult education course in screenwriting in which the comic-strip creator was a student. The two became friends and when the idea to do a musical surfaced, Toomey was on board. Inspired in equal parts by *You're a Good Man Charlie Brown* and *Doonesbury The Musical*, Mead worked with Toomey and, in just two months this past summer, developed a story that addressed modern-day concerns regarding global warming and eco-consciousness and everyday themes of human nature as Sherman and Megan meet and fall in love.

Now halfway through this prolific theater season, Mead, his colleagues, and his students have little time to pause and catch their creative breath. The second half of the school year will feature student-directed productions of *Copenhagen* by Michael Frayn and August Strindberg's *Miss Julie*, French playwright Pierre Marivaux's *The Dispute* with guest direction by Ali El-Gasseir (Ahmed's brother), and Shakespeare's tragedy *King Lear* directed by Mead.

*Sherman's Lagoon The Musical* will be performed at the Bentley School Lafayette Campus in the Student Performing Art Center on February 1-3 and 8-10. Evening performances will be held at 7 pm on Fridays and Saturdays, and daytime shows will start at 2 pm on Saturdays and Sundays. For tickets go to [tickets@bentleystudent.net](mailto:tickets@bentleystudent.net).