

# Theater Troop to Act A ‘Fool’ Beginning Friday

By Anne Cunningham  
Staff Writer

Described as “a side-splitting comedy the whole family can enjoy,” Cal State East Bay’s College of Letters Arts and Social Sciences presents Neil Simon’s “Fools” Friday and Saturday in the University Theatre.

Best known as the author of “The Odd Couple,” Simon based “Fools” on the Yiddish story “The Wise Man of Chelm,” in the mid 1980s. “Fools” is said to be one of Simon’s most underrated works.

The story takes place in the fictional town of Kulyenchikov, which has been cursed with chronic stupidity for 200 years. Out of desperation, they hire a young, newly-graduated schoolteacher to break the curse, and he must do so within 24 hours.

“The atmosphere, characters and physical comedy appeal to children, and adults are entertained by the many quick one-liners,” said director Marc Jacobs.

Jacobs is well-versed in all areas of production. He teaches acting courses at CSUEB, in addition to directing professionally at Broadway by the Bay in Burlingame.

He researched dialogue and traditions of Jewish and Ukrainian culture from the early 1900s that are showcased in the play, in a kind of cultural immersion program, to really capture the authenticity of the time.

Jacobs is also directing “Fiddler on the Roof” this summer at Broadway by the Bay.

“This play is all about dry-witted, New York-Jewish humor,” says Jacobs “It’s got the feeling of being at a Jewish wedding while everybody is blasted.”

The cast began production at the beginning of the winter quarter, meeting twice a week. Jacobs says that gaps between rehearsals usually tend to slow the momentum, as professional performers rehearse daily.

“This is an unusually dedicated cast that managed to put in the extra time on its own to really polish the performance to a professional level,” said Jacobs.

CSUEB sophomore Alex Buckley plays the lead as schoolteacher Leon, the potential town savior. He said he learned a lot about Jewish culture working on the production.

“The hardest part is the timing; it’s a very fast-paced show,” said Buckley. “The set, costumes and make-up are all very exaggerated and cartoon-like. It is a very expressive performance.”

Part of the reason for the surreal atmosphere lies in the physical transformation of the actors who project cartoon-like appearances.

CSUEB junior Felicia Lillianthal designed the wigs and make-up, incorporating prosthetic facial enhancements in an effort to further exaggerate the characters’ expressions.

The set design by Morgan Chap-

man and the costume design by Regina Cate are based upon true aspects of the time period and culture, verified in the pre-production research employed by Jacobs.

The choreography by CSUEB senior Lauren Hanzel does not miss a beat in several short dance numbers in the show.

“I created the dance numbers so that they would look traditional in the context of this very silly community,” Hanzel said.

Computerized cue-marks and timing are imperative to the productions’ success. This seamless magic is orchestrated by Richard Olmsted, in charge of lighting design and technical direction, and stage manager Karen Ullrich.

About 1,500 tickets were pre-sold to children at local schools. The cast will meet and greet the public after the performance.

At the last dress rehearsal, Jacobs’ final comment to his cast was to “have fun with it.” The interaction between the cast showed that they would.

“People should come see this play because it is pure fun,” said Jacobs. “We are living in stressful times these days. This play gives people a great chance to laugh; it reminds us all of a much simpler time. It’s a great diversion.”

Show times are Friday at 8 p.m. and Saturday at 2 and 8 p.m. Tickets are \$7 general admission, \$6 for youth and seniors, \$5 for CSUEB students and \$3 for children.

# Student Artists Kick-Off Annual Exhibition

By Michael Chung  
Staff Writer

The finest works of art that Cal State East Bay students have to offer will be showcased in this month’s Annual Juried Student Exhibition in the University Art Gallery.

An award ceremony and barbecue-potluck reception Wednesday evening will kick off the show, which will be sponsored by the CSUEB College of Letters, Arts and Social Sciences.

Jamie Brunson, a Bay Area painter, curator and art critic, judged this year’s entries.

The results will be announced at the ceremony.

“This annual juried exhibition is an important event for the students because, for many, it is the first time they have shown their artwork to anyone from outside the university community,” said Michael Henninger, chair of the CSUEB art department, in a press release.

The application process creates an opportunity for students to reflect on the work they have done so far, Henninger said, whether a particular student’s work is accepted into the show by the juror or not.

“A number of prizes and scholarships are awarded to students, who are then better able to continue their studies,” Henninger said. “Finally, the reception is a great time for all the students, faculty, staff and other

art lovers to celebrate the completion of another successful school year.”

Grace Munakata, a CSUEB art professor, said any student who has taken an art class since summer quarter could enter artwork for this year’s competition.

“Artwork in all media can be submitted, including painting, drawing, printmaking, mixed (more than one) media, ceramics, sculpture, photography, digital graphics and multimedia,” Munakata said.

She said that previous jurors have included Mildred Howard, a prominent black artist who works in several media; Carrie Lederer, curator for the Bedford Gallery at the Dean Leshner Center for the Arts in Walnut Creek; and Trisha Bransten, from the Rena Bransten Gallery in San Francisco.

“Many local art organizations, alumni and local art vendors, such as San Leandro’s Art Supply Store, make contributions for awards and scholarships, which are given to students who exhibit outstanding work,” Munakata said.

She added that some donors have revolving trusts, including one from the estate of art professor Howard Slatoff, who passed away a few years ago, and another generated by an artist and alumni, John Toki and his father, Rayer Toki, which is designated for ceramics.

Brunson said that working with the gallery staff was a very positive experience because everyone was so professional and knowledgeable.

“I particularly enjoyed seeing the range of work that was submitted,” Brunson said. “I think it reflected the

diversity of interests and backgrounds shared by the student population.”

Brunson said that, in a selection process where there is just one example of work to choose from, it was hard to know if the artist is producing work at a consistent level of quality or if the one piece was their best.

“Several pieces made me wish that I could have seen more examples of the artist’s work to really understand where they were coming from,” Brunson said.

Brunson added that writing art criticism has taught her to look beyond her own personal tastes to the formal or ideological validity of another person’s art.


“In other words, I may not agree with the aesthetic, technique or concept behind a piece of art, but if I can see the commitment of the person who made it, or can see evidence of consistent technical skill, then I can appreciate the work — even if it’s not the kind of work that I would make or want to live with,” Brunson said.

“For me, an artist’s evident passion for their subject matter sometimes outweighed undeveloped technique ... people may be surprised by the wide selection of work, but I picked pieces that were based on fairly conventional subject matter, re-interpreted in an interesting new way, along with strong pieces that were very contemporary and fresh.”

The exhibition will be on display May 11–30 at the gallery, located in the Art and Education Building and is open Wednesday through Friday from 12:30-3:30 p.m. Admission is free.

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Michael Henninger  
chair of the CSUEB art department



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