

'It's a Wonderful Life' at TSF with radio play set for Kilgore stage

By **CHELSEA KATZ**

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With a few more elements and a slightly expanded UpStairs Space, work has officially begun on this year's Texas Shakespeare Festival Christmas radio play.

For a second year, five TSF actors will bring to life for the in-person and radio audience the world of George and Mary Bailey as they present "It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play."

At first, TSF Associate Artistic Directors Meaghan and Matthew Simpson thought about working on another radio play for its fifth annual Christmas radio play with three years of "A Christmas Carol" preceding "It's a Wonderful Life."

"They listened to their audience, though, and kept it for another year.

"We were surprised that people really advocated for us to do this

again... When we brought up the idea of doing another show, people were shocked," Matthew said. "They were very upset about the idea, and they said, 'You have to do 'Wonderful Life' again.'... So we listened."

Continuing in its second year with three new actors to the radio play, Meaghan said, there is nothing stale about the story, noting their own love for the story, both as a play and a movie.

"It feels just right," she said. "It feels right for this time of year, and we're excited to bring the story to life but to add the new elements."

Joining the cast this year are Caitlin Cavannaugh, Stephen Shore and Micah Goodding, who previously played the narrator in the third annual production of "A Christmas Carol."

Audience members also will get to hear the cast perform 20 minutes of Christmas music before each show.

As in previous years, the actors will produce the sound effects used during the play with the help of a collection of objects, including, for example, everyday items like a wooden box, shoes, a tin bucket and tub, a washboard and a whistle.

"I just like how it feels like a playground," Meaghan said. "We have literally all these toys around, and it feels very acted. It doesn't feel like a typical play."

The five actors on stage will be portraying all the characters in the play, from the people presenting the story to the people of Bedford Falls, New York.

"I'm excited to try and distinguish these characters' voices because there's no costume changes," Shore said.

Goodding is playing about 10 different characters, he said; challenge is not transitioning between

the voices but making sure he is supporting the other actors as they need with the sound effects.

"We want it to be interesting to look at, so we've got some choreographed movement from going from mic station to station and that is the more challenging thing about it," he said. "The lines, we all pretty much



NEWS HERALD photo by CHELSEA KATZ

Stephen Shore explores the various props and sound effect items set up for Texas Shakespeare Festival's "It's a Wonderful Life: A Radio Play" on the stage in the Upstairs Space. (Below) The five-person cast, who play all the characters in the radio play, sit down for their first table read of the script Monday night in the TSF Festival Center.

have down, and the characters we could ever imagine," Shore said. Cavannaugh added that as much joy and happiness is associated with Christmastime, it can also be a lonely time for some people as they remember loved ones who are not with them.

"If you come see the show, you're inviting joy of this story in... It deals with miracles and it deals with saving lives (and) families," Shore said.

Goodding described the space as fitting for the show, saying it feels like being in someone's living room on Christmas Eve.

"Getting to do this makes it really feel like Christmas... It has this warm feeling to it, and as an actor, you can sit here and see everyone's faces, and so it feels very communal and very warm and not at all like other performance opportunities we have, which I think is so appropriate for this show," he said.

Having spent multiple summers in Kilgore with TSF, Cavannaugh said, the town of Bedford Falls, New York, reminds her of Kilgore.

"There's something just really special about this story; that's for sure. Something about only getting the sound and not seeing it, you can still picture what you know and love with maybe a little bit of a twist," she said.

People will have four opportunities to see "It's a Wonderful Life: A Radio Play" in person: Friday, Dec. 8 at 7:30 p.m.; Saturday, Dec. 9 at 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.; and Sunday, Dec. 10 at 2 p.m.

Tickets are \$20 each and can be purchased on the TSF website at TexasShakespeare.com. All performance will take place in the TSF UpStairs Space in the Festival Center at 815 Houston Street.

"That story that one person makes a much bigger difference than we

WHEN YOU GO:

What: Texas Shakespeare Festival presents "It's a Wonderful Life: A Radio Play"

When: 7:30 p.m. Dec. 8
2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. Dec. 9
2 p.m. Dec. 10

Where: UpStairs Space (in the TSF Festival Center at 815 Houston St.)

Cost: \$20 per ticket, available at TexasShakespeare.com

