

Timing is key in upcoming 'Noises Off'

'Over-the-top comedy' takes us behind scenes at theater

BY DOLORES FOX GIARDELLI

Slamming doors, falling trousers and flying sardines.

Pacific Coast Repertory Theatre continues its season with a show about a delightfully dysfunctional touring theater troupe in Michael Frayn's "Noises Off," which opens Jan. 27 at the Firehouse Arts Center.

English playwright Frayn hit on the idea for the comedy as he watched from the wings a performance of "The Two of Us," a farce he had written for Lynn Redgrave.

"It was funnier from behind than in front, and I thought that one day I must write a farce from behind," Frayn said.

"Noises Off" is a farce that is an over-the-top comedy with one door opening and another slamming," explained David Judson, who is directing the play as well as playing the leading role of Lloyd the director within the play.

"It is fun being both David Judson and Lloyd," Judson said. "We share a few similarities — precision in staging, English heritage — and many differences — philandering and giant mood swings."

"This off-the-wall comedy requires incredible

physical timing from all of our actors," Judson said. "We were fortunate to find 11 incredibly gifted performers that all have experience in professional musical theater. As director, I wanted to work with people that were comfortable in their bodies."

Musical theater professionals can all move very well, he noted, which is important in a fast-paced comedy.

"It requires choreographic precision," he said.

Judson, one of PCRT's founders, turned professional 20 years ago on a national tour of a similar play called "Sheer Madness," he said.

"Noises Off" continues PCRT's season of productions that have a show within a show, which began in November with "42nd Street" and will continue in the spring with "Rock of Ages."

"This show also enabled me to enlist my two dear friends and Pacific Coast Repertory Theatre artistic teammates — Joy Sherratt, who is associate artistic director, and Amy Franklin Leonards, artistic associate," Judson said.

"Since I am on stage at various moments in the show, I wanted their expertise with some of the staging and fight choreography," he continued. "In

addition to all of their

other acting expertise, both of them also have strong dance backgrounds.

"This expertise will really help us all move in unison and in intentional disharmony as an ensemble throughout this comedy."

"Noises Off" will be the first non-musical for Pacific Coast Repertory Theatre, which began its seasons of musicals at the Firehouse Arts Center in 2011. The 1982 comedy received multiple Tony nominations, and was adapted into a film in 1992 starring Carol Burnett, John Ritter, Christopher Reeve and Michael Caine.

"I love this movie," Judson said. "Although the stage play differs in several spots from the movie, I was able to pay homage to this great film in many scenes."

"Noises Off" features three acts: The first takes place in the rehearsal hall the night before opening; the second act is backstage; the last act is the final performance.

"This makes it very challenging for us actors," Judson said. "We want to give the illusion that we are improving to some degree. The reality is that most every move we make is calculated or someone would literally get hurt, particularly in the second act."

"Of course, there is a little improv, but most of the whole show is staged like a brilliant ballet," he added. "It has to be beautiful and precise or it won't work." ■



BERENICE SULLIVAN
David Judson (second from left) plays Lloyd the director of the play within the play "Noises Off," with (left to right) Ayelet Firstenberg as Brooke; Michael Doppe, Garry; Ross Neuenfeldt, Frederick; and Hannah Keller, Poppy.

Funniest farce

What: "Noises Off"

Who: Pacific Coast Repertory Theatre

When: Jan. 27-Feb.

11, Fridays at 8 p.m.; Saturdays at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m.; and Sundays at 2 p.m.

Where: Firehouse Arts Center, 4444 Railroad Ave.

Tickets: \$19-\$41; call 931-4848, visit www.firehousearts.org or go to theater box office.

Inside the Show: A discussion with the director and principal actors will take place after the matinee performance Sunday, Jan. 28.