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Love and debt: A look at the light side

Theater troupe plans production of comedy 'Love, Sex and the IR\$'

BY HOWARD MCEWEN | ENQUIRER CONTRIBUTOR

NEWPORT - In the midst of tax season, Newport-based theater troupe Footlighters Inc. decided to do its part to lighten up the subject with a comedy called "Love, Sex and the IR\$."

The play, written by William Van Zandt and Jane Milmore, was first performed on Broadway in the late 1970s, but themes and situations are as timeless as, well, death and taxes.

"It's one of the best scripts I ever read," said Jeanette Tacon, who plays Kate Dennis in the play.

ADVERTISEMENT Set in present-day New York, Jon and Leslie are two struggling bachelors rooming together in a small unadorned bachelor pad. In a lapse in judgment, Leslie allows Jon to do his taxes. While doing so, Jon hatches an idea. Leslie can be either a man's or woman's name. If Leslie were a woman and if they were married, the extra deduction would mean a little extra cash in both their pockets. Without running the scheme by his roommate or his fiancée, Kate, Jon fudges their 1040s. All seems well until the IRS notices Leslie's abrupt sex change and dispatches agent Floyd Spinner, played by Brian Richardson, to investigate.

Similar in style to Neil Simon's "The Odd Couple," the play unfolds in Jon and Leslie's apartment.

"Contrary to the title, sex is not a big part of the play. It's just a delightful and well-written play," said Robert Weidle, the show's director.

Known mostly for musicals, Weidle has been a fixture in the region's community theater scene for many years. Cincinnati's Association for Community Theatre has nominated him for an Orchid Award for his past direction of the Footlighters "The 1940s Radio Hour" and "Little Shop of Horrors." He has won an Orchid for playing Marcellus in "The Music Man."

"It's a family show ... maybe PG-13," said Jim Curtis, who plays Jon. "Love, Sex, and the IR\$" will be a change for Curtis. This is the first nonmusical in which he'll perform in 15 years. His past credits include Jesus in the Footlighters' "Jesus Christ Superstar" and Johnny Cantone in "The 1940s Radio Hour."

Eric Day, who plays Leslie and spends much of the play in drag trying to outwit the IRS agent, first saw the play performed by the Village Players in Fort Thomas in 1990. "I thought if I ever have a chance, I want to be in this play," he said.

The bachelor's problems with the IRS are further compounded by their building superintendent Mr. Jansen, played by Jon Vater. Mr. Jansen holds old-fashioned notions about who should and shouldn't be in the bachelor's apartment but seems to be a bit more concerned with his tenants than himself.

Referring to 1970s TV stock characters, Weidle said, "He's a bit of a cross between Mr. Roper of 'Three's Company' and Schneider from 'One Day at a Time.'"

"It's such a diametric opposite of what I am," said Vater. "He's a slob. This guy lets it all hang out. His whole approach is so brazen."

If you go

When: 8 p.m.
Thursday through
Saturday; 2 and 7
p.m. Sunday,
through March 5

Where: Stained
Glass Theatre,
802 York St.,
Newport

Tickets: \$17

**More
information:**
(513) 474-8711

The Footlighters have performed in The Stained Glass Theatre at Eighth and York streets in Newport since 1986. The theater was built in 1882 as a Methodist church. A hundred years later, the struggling church called it quits after a tornado sent their steeple crashing several stories to the basement. After some investment in the building and some updating, the Footlighters have called it home ever since.

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