Litsey collaborates on comedy about Florida fishing tourney

Playwright and Associate Professor of Theatre Dr. Alan Litsey has collaborated on a new play set on the Florida island of Boca Grande, where he spent two weeks this summer studying and writing a comedy about the World’s Richest Tarpon Tournament.

Working with Litsey to write the play was Elizabeth Spicer, producing director of the Royal Palm Players of Boca Grande.

Prior to Litsey’s trip to the island, the two playwrights were already working on their characters. Litsey studied up on local life and culture when Spicer sent him newspaper articles and relayed tidbits about life on the island.

They both were on board the luxurious $1 million yacht that served as the press boat during the Boca Grande Chamber of Commerce’s World’s Richest Tarpon Tournament.

They lunched and chatted with reporters and watched the fishing action taking place in the pass.

Litsey said he has known Spicer for the past six years since they met at the Southeastern Theatre Conference when it was held in Birmingham and they’ve worked together to start a new high school play contest, among other projects.

“Boca Grande is a beautiful and friendly community,” Litsey said. We were there two weeks and Elizabeth and I got really good work done. And, my wife, Diane, and I had a lot of good family time with our children.”

Litsey said that the play is titled “Boca Grande: The Soap” and is a wildly bold spoof of island life. The characters are plotting to win the fishing tournament—in real life, the winner takes home $120,000.

“The central character, Wanda Lou Wynette, is trying to win so that she can afford to send her daughter to a private school on the island. She and others (her sister and her evil ex-husband) end up on the boat—surviving a huge explosion masterminded by the play’s villains. Of course, the heroes make it to shore safely, thanks to a handy but unique flotation device—a well worn barcalounger. The style of the play is very bold—anything can happen. One of my favorite scenes includes a chase scene on golf carts, complete with tarpons on board. The play ends with a surprise cliff-hanger.

“We wrote the scenes together in the mornings beginning at 9 a.m. and going as long as we were productive. We finished a first draft of the entire play, except for two scenes, which we wrote later that summer. We’ll do some revisions over the holidays, via e-mail and phone. It has been pure fun,” he explained.

“I love to write and it was great fun collaborating with Elizabeth. I really looked forward to those morning sessions. Typically we worked half days. Elizabeth had already created the characters and the story. In fact, several other plays featuring these characters have been very successful in Atlanta and Louisville. It was nice to be in the rhythm of working in the mornings and playing the rest of the day.”

This is not Litsey’s first work. He wrote a play called “Birmingham Waltz” for the Season Performers of Birmingham that toured spring and fall of 2002. He also wrote “Marion Faustus, Ph.D.,” a play about a professor who is trying to gain her tenure that was performed last year by BSC students. He is currently completing a play about the 17th century female playwright Aphra Behn, for which he received an Individual Artist Fellowship by the Alabama State Council on the Arts.

“I worked in the theatre many years before I felt ready to write. And I have a lot to learn about the writing craft. As a director, you’re involved with every aspect of a production, but as a playwright, often you’re handing it off to someone else. I won’t have a chance to see this play in performance until opening night. For me, writing is a natural extension of teaching and directing,” Litsey said.

The residents of Boca Grande will have the opportunity to enjoy the results of Litsey’s collaboration with Spicer when their farce opens April 1 as dinner theatre at the Gasparilla Inn Beach Club.

Kirkpatrick selected for national teacher accreditation board

Dr. Rusty Kirkpatrick, associate professor of education, recently was nominated to serve on the Board of Examiners for the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education.

Board members are enlisted to fulfill a major role in the NCATE accreditation program and are a critical point of contact for institutions seeking accreditation.

Having completed an intensive week of board training in Akron, Ohio, Kirkpatrick began serving a three-year term on the NCATE Board of Examiners this fall. During the term, she will participate in a five-day site visit each semester.

Kirkpatrick received her nomination to join the board from the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education. She also has served as the NCATE coordinator for the BSC Division of Education whose program is reviewed by NCATE every five years.

NCATE is a professional accrediting organization for education schools in the U.S., which is composed of teachers, educators, and policy makers.