

**CAMPUS NEWS**

## GWU Departments of Theatre Arts and Music Present Spring Musical, 'Quilters'

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### Show offers Unique Challenges for Cast and Bluegrass Orchestra

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—“Quilters,” presented by the Gardner-Webb University Departments of Theatre Arts and Music, is a musical with some unique characteristics and challenges for the small cast. Set in the 1850s, the show celebrates the pioneering women who cared for their families on the difficult, and sometimes disastrous, journey west. Performances will be in Dover Theatre on Feb. 24-26 at 7:30 p.m. and Feb. 27 at 2:30 p.m.

As the show begins, the audience will observe the most noticeable difference—the small orchestra will be on stage with the actors. “It features music that all ages will identify with, especially our seniors,” stated GWU Associate Professor Dr. Stafford Turner, the show’s stage and music director. “It will be a fun evening,”



▲ Director Dr. Stafford Turner instructs the cast during rehearsal.

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Written by Molly Newman and Barbara Damashek, the musical is also unusual in its content and characters. “This musical doesn’t have a through-story or plot like most musicals,” Turner explained. “It is made up of small, scene-sized vignettes that highlight the particular challenges in the lives of brave pioneer women on their journey westward. The cast is made up of seven students and one faculty member. While the cast of characters listed in the program will show each actor linked to a particular name, each of these actors will play many varying characters over the course of the evening. The total of these varying characters is around 100. This represents 12-14 different personalities per actor, which is a huge challenge in itself.”

Turner was drawn to the show because the stories represent real-life scenarios of women in the wagon trains. Besides the music and the theme, the show resonates on another level. “Many of us have quilts on our beds that were passed down from relatives, and some of us might even still participate in the seemingly timeless art of quilting,” Turner offered. “The show features 16 well-known quilting patterns, all of which are combined for a wonderful and memorable ending tableau. It is an experience that will be remembered for a long time.”

Rebecca Belk, senior theatre major, auditioned for the musical because it would be her last opportunity to be a show directed by Turner. “I have loved singing and acting since I was a child,” she shared. “I’m grateful for the opportunity to spend time around so many supportive people. In ‘Quilters,’ each actor gets to play multiple characters in different age ranges. Some even get to be cows! The music is beautiful, and the writers did a great job of keeping it light before and after dark moments.”



Demmie Johnson plays a daughter named Margaret. She wanted to be in the musical because her 82-year-old grandmother, Wilma Epley, is a quilter. “When I read the script, I was shocked with how much of this lined up with her life, and I knew it was special,” Johnson observed. “She is very excited to see it, and she has been my inspiration throughout the entire project. She also has been so sweet with allowing us to use many of her quilts and scraps as practice props. The musical is the celebration of the art of quilting that is dying away if we do not pick it up. It also talks about many things that are overlooked in history and what these women really went through. The celebration of strength and resilience is beautiful.”

Anna Sample, who also plays a daughter in the musical, agreed that switching roles is challenging, but she has enjoyed learning all the parts. “I like the fact that I get to act in so many different characters,” she explained. “One minute I’m a patient in the asylum, another I am a child playing and laughing. It is so much fun getting to do all sorts of different things in the same show.”

Dr. Patricia Sparti is conducting the bluegrass orchestra, featuring violin, cello, guitar, mandolin, dulcimer, bass, banjo, piano, and various percussion instruments. She noted the audience will hear the piano played for sound effects in ways that will be new to many.

The members of the orchestra are:

- Kate Strickland.
- Billy Norton.
- Malcolm Cline.
- Bradley Ellis.
- Jay Seagrave.
- Skylar Mosteller.
- Payton Hoffman.

The cast includes:

- Norma Mott, instructor of nursing, a new faculty member.

- Rebecca Belk, theatre major.
- Elie Brinson, theatre major.
- Emily Brinton, theatre major.
- Demmie Johnson, nursing major.
- Charity Rosenhauer, biology major.
- Anna Sample, theatre major.
- Grace Schiefen, music education major.

Tickets are free for Gardner-Webb students and children under 12; \$5 for GWU faculty and staff; \$15 for adults; and \$10 for students, seniors and veterans.

**Purchase tickets.**

***Auxiliary aids will be made available to persons with disabilities upon request 10 days prior to the event. Please call (704) 406-4253 or email [servicerequests@gardner-webb.edu](mailto:servicerequests@gardner-webb.edu) with your request.***

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