

## Dell'Arte Returning to Historic Winema

By Lisa Baney

The Dell'Arte theatre troupe will present its annual holiday show in Scotia at the Winema Theater on Wednesday, December 7, at 7:30 pm. The program is free; a canned food donation is requested.

Thursday, December 10, 2009  
6:30 am

The sky is still dark and my feet are cold and stubby in my boots as I make my way to the Winema Theater, fumble with the keys, and open the front door. The Dell'Arte players will be here soon and someone needs to let them in.

Inside, the place is silent and vast, colder than outside. I turn on the rumbly heater and it revs up to begin the day-long task of heating the room. There's a squeak above me; a lone bat flits across the rafters. Please, just stay up there, I think at it. You guys can have up there if we get down here.

I creak around making ready, and finally, at 7, steel myself and open the back doors. The cold slaps at me and I slit my eyes, shuddering.

And then I catch my breath. The morning has become stunningly beautiful. In the east there's a pink-yellow-blue glow just behind the mountain, mist trailing lace fingers through the redwoods. In the west what remains of the night is a spangled, fading indigo. My breath comes from me in streams and hangs in the air; the world has been washed golden-pink.

From down the alley two large trucks begin to take shape, emerging from the mist as they come toward me trailing exhaust plumes as thick as rain clouds. They make lumbering three-point turns and back up close to the theater doors. On the truck closest to me the door opens and a man jumps down. He's short and wiry with a long, well-cared-for ponytail, eyes blue as a glacier, and about fifteen tiny hoops rimming each ear. "Morning," he says. "You ready for us?" This is Spike, the technical director. Behind him the rest of the crew gathers, huddling in their fleeces and blinking in the chill. They look like sleepy teenagers.

Dell'Arte has come to town.

When you walk into the Winema Theatre you walk nearly 100 years into the past.

The rafters are kingdom-come high. The place moans like a living being whenever the wind blows. The whole building is made of some of the most expensive wood in the world.

Begun in 1919, finished in 1920, the Winema was built to be an entertainment hub for Pacific Lumber Company workers and their families. It was de-



## Merry Christmas, Scotia!

The holiday season is usually packed with activities, and this year is no exception. In addition to the usual goings on around town, we have two special Christmas events taking place at the Winema Theater. First, on Dec. 7, the Dell'Arte theatre troupe returns with "The Nutcaper," a zany interpretation of the Nutcracker ballet. There is no charge for this performance; a canned food donation is requested. Then on December 16, the Humboldt Light Opera Co. Women's Chorus presents "Christmas with the Babes: Music for a Beautiful Season." A donation is requested to help offset the costs of future productions. Both performances begin at 7:30 p.m. Merry Christmas!

signed by acclaimed San Francisco architect Alfred Henry Jacobs, whose career blossomed, perhaps predictably, in the aftermath of the 1906 earthquake. He designed the first house that Ansel Adams owned, as well as many San Francisco Art Deco movie palaces, of which the lavish Curran Theater on Geary Street is the lone survivor. It's a mystery how such a man came to design a theater—his most spectacular, according to one historian—in what could arguably be thought of as the middle of nowhere; but here she stands, described by various experts as "a wooden Parthenon," "cathedral-like," and "resembling a Tyrolean Swiss chalet." Within her walls have been presented Vaudeville reviews, silent films, the first talkies, brass bands, swing bands, rock bands, and lots and lots of community meetings. The people of Scotia have always cherished the Winema; during the 1992 fire four fire departments labored successfully to keep her unharmed even as the buildings next to her burned to the ground.

Into this amazing space bustle Spike and his crew. There are only five or six of them, and they each know what to do. With the efficient choreography of an ER team they haul in what looks to be the makings of a city; walls, doors, lights, ladders, a larger-than-life alarm clock, a bunk bed sized for a giant. They work with their fingerless gloves on, almost silently, bundled still in their hats and parkas and fleece. They take occasional breaks to drink coffee and nibble on pastries, murmuring their thanks and quietly marveling

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The Dell'Arte Company PRESENTS  
THE 31ST ANNUAL HOLIDAY SHOW 2011

The **NUTCAPER**  
A NUTCRACKER TAIL  
DIRECTED BY JOAN SCHIRLE

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 7  
WINEMA THEATER, SCOTIA  
7:30 PM

TICKETS AVAILABLE AT:  
WILDBERRIES MARKETPLACE, UMPQUA BANK, PIERSON BUILDING CENTER & IN-PERSON AT DELL'ARTE'S BOX OFFICE

**FREE PERFORMANCE**  
MORE INFO/FULL TOUR SCHEDULE:  
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BRING A CANNED FOOD DONATION

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PIERSON BUILDING CENTER

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ART WORKS

DELTA

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at the theater's grandeur.

They don't seem like actors to me. Actors in my experience are very aware of their place in the world, and it's not grappling on the cold floor with a staple gun assembling sets. These Dell'Arte people are just regular people, intent on getting their jobs done. They seem so ordinary, as a matter of fact, that I ask a young woman, bundled head to toe in fleece and wheeling in a rack of costumes, if the actors would be arriving soon. She looks at me. "We're the actors," she says.

"Ah," I say. "You're...um, working so hard at everything else, I thought maybe..." I trail off. My glance falls on the costumes. I can't tell exactly but hanging in the rack there's something that looks a lot like a large orange beak next to a red tutu-like garment of billowing tulle.

The woman smiles at me. "I'm Elizabeth," she says in a soft voice. "Where can I put these?" I show her the dressing rooms and help her maneuver the rack up the narrow stairs. After that, though, it's about staying out of their way.

I walk up into the seats and stand watching as the vast interior of the Winema is transformed into another world entirely—all the while nursing a secret anxiety about the ability of these very nice, polite, industrious, soft-spoken young people to play big.



Once, many years ago, backpacking in Bavaria, I heard from a fellow hosteler that a traveling circus from Munich would be in town for that one night only. The hostel had an early curfew but my new friend promised to unlock the door for me when I came back.

I hiked into town. As I neared the city center I became one of a growing crowd all headed one way: toward the capacious circus tent, with its red-striped canvas walls and scarlet banners snapping in the evening breeze. When we got to within a half-mile of the tent there appeared suddenly a mime, dressed as a gentleman in vintage evening clothes, gesturing for us to keep going. Another mime appeared a few minutes later, this one a lady in vintage white, and the two of them mimed a courtly dance. The crowd laughed and exclaimed and we all walked faster. A lion roared somewhere up ahead; we could hear snatches of a faint, melancholic accordion.

The show was bewitching. There were brilliantly costumed jugglers, flaming hoops and jointless acrobats; white-faced clowns made poignant dramas and inside jokes; the lone accordionist played songs everyone sang along with. As one we gasped, laughed, grew silent, applauded, screamed in delighted shock. Afterwards we walked out laughing with each other, reliving the show. It didn't matter that I didn't speak German. I hiked back to the hostel in the chill Bavarian night light-hearted and at peace.

However, I did have to climb through a window to get back in.



6:45 pm  
It's 45 minutes before show time and I'm nervous as a new bride entertaining her husband's boss. The place is empty of everyone but Dell'Arte people and a few Scotia volunteers. "What if no one comes?" I ask everyone I see. "We

should have put up more posters," I moan. "It's too cold for people to come out tonight," I wail. Everyone just smiles and looks away. How will I explain to Food for People about the empty barrel?

I walk outside for the bajillionth time and peer down the street. It's dark, and the town looks amazing. Lights blaze from everywhere—from the trees along Main Street and the Scotia Inn and just about every house in town. Tonight, I think, Scotia has invited guests over, and the Winema Theater is our living room. If they'd only get here.

I turn around to go back in to get warm; and suddenly, as if released from some upstream dam, the cars start arriving. Within minutes the lobby is jammed with families in heavy coats and hats and gloves. The food barrel quickly fills up, canned goods are stacking up against the wall. Kids are running up and down the aisles, teenagers slump in groups in the back rows.

An older woman makes her way through the crowd to me, her beautiful face aglow. "I've always wanted to see the inside of this theatre," she enthuses. "It's so magnificent!"

"Yes," I say. I'm smiling so hard my face hurts.

The lights in the lobby blink once, twice. It's show time. Everyone hurries to take their seats. The house lights dim, the noisy heater clicks off, the audience falls into hushed anticipation as the stage lights come up.

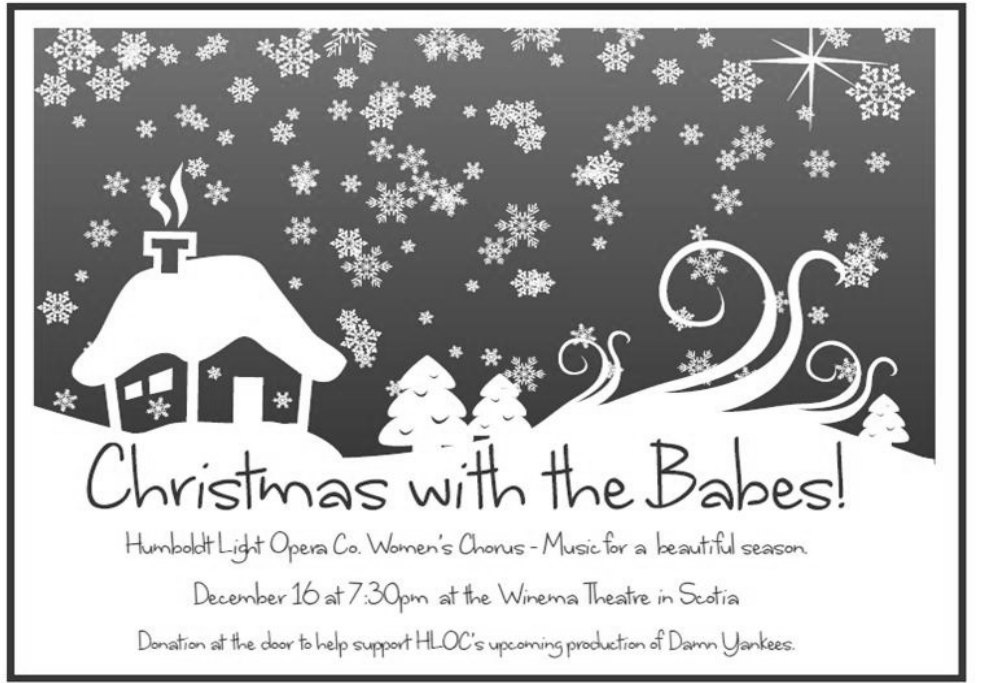
The play begins.

This year, 2009, the show is A Christmas Carol, done Dell'Arte style, the story familiar and yet completely original, the characters as far from cliché as it is possible to be. Scrooge is a gangly nincompoop, the ghosts quirky and comical, and everyone wears masks. At one point a woman strides onto the stage, the Ghost of Christmas Present, dressed in familiar-looking red tulle, a red bustier, and not much else. Her voice fills the theater with the vocal power of an opera singer. With a start I recognize her: Elizabeth, the soft-spoken costume woman. These are not the ordinary people who were duct-taping a plywood moon this afternoon. These people—these actors—are open and wild, improvisational, cooperative, free. They shine with a wacky brilliance. They definitely play big.

Like Bavaria all those years ago, the audience, as one, laughs, gasps, applauds and shrieks.

And then, just like that, the show is over. After the sustained applause, the curtain calls and the thank yous, the audience files out, chattering and light-hearted. The lobby doors bang shut behind the last of them, the lights blink off, and the actors become crew again. Within an hour, the sets are broken down, organized, neatly packed up and ready to roll out.

I walk outside to see them off. The night is very cold. The trucks rumble, wreathed in mist, and the troupe stand for a few moments, laughing and clowning together before having to climb in for the long trek back to Blue Lake. As I watch, astonished, two of the players briefly come together and, arms extended, engage in a twirling, courtly dance. The rest of the crew clap; one of the men sings a few bars of an unfamiliar tune. The dancers laugh, fall away from each other, slap mittened palms; and then they all climb onto the trucks and head back through the falling mist out of town.



Join the ladies of the Humboldt Light Opera Company Women's chorus, below, as they perform songs of the season "with mirth, merriment, and occasional solemnity followed by more gaiety."



Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays everyone! 'Tis the season to gather with family and cherished friends in comfortable and familiar surroundings to celebrate the season, tell stories, exchange gifts and enjoy each other's company.

Through the cold nights, chilly mornings and evenings here in Scotia, we hope you will take some extra cheer this year from the effort our staff and residents have taken to decorate the town for the holidays. We have installed more decorations and lights than ever before in the heart of Scotia, from the "Merry Christmas" sign over Main Street to new and special decorations on and about the historic Winema Theater. Especially at this time of the year, the Winema is at the civic and social heart of our community.

In addition to the presentation by The Dell'Arte Company on December 7<sup>th</sup>, and the Humboldt Light Opera Women's Chorus presentation on De-



**FRANK TALK** with Frank!

December 16<sup>th</sup>, we will continue to try to arrange additional events, productions and presentations at the community Theater, including, perhaps, the Scotia school Christmas program, and a New Year's Eve party / dance. Watch for more information on our webpage, newsletter or fliers sent to your home or business, posted on local bulletin boards or at the Winema box office.

While we work out the details for these other events, we would welcome suggestions or recommendations from members of the community. Is there is an event, gathering, production or presentation you'd like to see? Do you think you and your

family would like to attend free Christmas movies presented at the Winema during the Christmas break when the kids are home from school? Would you be interested in attending if we projected NFL playoff games or the Super Bowl on the big screen at the Theater (without charge of course)? Should we consider including a potluck food or drink element in any of these kinds of activities? Let us have some timely feedback, and we'll get started organizing and arranging other activities to bring us together in our magnificent community facilities.

Also during this season of giving and giving thanks, let's not forget how important it is to help those less fortunate than ourselves. As you know, the Town of Scotia sponsors the Community Food Bank here in Scotia, and we want to encourage everyone to join us in facilitating and contributing to that effort. The Food Bank, through its efforts by local volunteers

and assistance from Food For People, provides an invaluable resource to those in our community in times of need. Remember to bring your nonperishable food items for collection at The Dell'Arte Company's presentation of The Nutcracker and help out when and as you can at our local Scotia Community Food Bank next to the Scotia Fire Hall.

Once again, from all of us at the Town of Scotia Company to all of our friends and neighbors in the community, please have a happy and safe Merry Christmas, and we wish you and yours a happy and prosperous New Year.