

Backyard and beyond: Texas Tech, Atkins students perform 'Dona Rosita' on Lubbock lawn

By William Kerns / A-J Media Entertainment Editor

Posted Jun 28, 2018 at 2:30 PM

Updated at 11:08 AM

The Texas Tech School of Theatre and Dance is no stranger at the annual Tennessee Williams Theater Festival in Provincetown, Mass. This year's third participating visit by Tech will focus on new challenges.

Tech's production of 1935 play "Dona Rosita the Spinster," written by Federico Garcia Lorca and directed by festival curator David Kaplan, will be performed five times during the 2018 festival on Sept. 27-30.

Only one preview performance of this production has been confirmed in Lubbock, at 7 p.m. Saturday in the backyard of an anonymous supporter's home at 3727 94th Place. There is no admission charge. Capacity is limited to approximately 50; early arrival is advised. An outdoor setting is intended to mimic the environment of the planned festival location this fall.

It was director Kaplan's idea to ask students to help tell the story, using fabric from a back yard clothes line.

Tech theater school officials opted to focus on local outreach.

Malana Wilson, a Tech musical theater student, is cast in the title role. Her co-stars include four students from Atkins Middle School, 5401 Ave. U - specifically Viviana Melendez, 13; Esperanza Gonzalez, 12; Fernando Ramirez, 12; and Zaira Cervantez, 11.

Fellow Atkins student Arianna Gonzalez was among those originally cast more than four months ago, but had to drop out.

Mark Charney, director of Tech's School of Theatre and Dance, said, "We could have cast our own students. But our school wanted to advance community education and experience by partnering with Atkins (Middle School)."

He stressed the importance of Atkins Principal Chris Huber and school drama teacher Amy Laney each supporting the opportunity offered their students.

Charney said this "illustrates a dedication to facilitating and supporting Hispanic culture and advancing community education and experience. ... This represents a milestone for these students, many of whom never have traveled outside of Lubbock.

"We are intent on making this a life-changing, educational experience for them."

Cory Norman, the Tech theater school's marketing and communication director, said Tech's group will arrive in Provincetown on Sept. 23, and return to Lubbock on Oct. 1. The cast, he added, has only a few days to rehearse on site prior to the festival.

"The cast of 'Dona Rosita' will have opportunities," said Norman, "to sit in on a lecture or two, especially one that covers, in general, the life and works of Tennessee Williams. Students from Atkins will find this one especially interesting. As the schedule permits, cast members also can watch other plays presented at this year's festival.

"It is a fast and full week, but one loaded with educational, theatrical experiences with artists from all over the world."

"Dona Rosita the Spinster" is a story of unrequited love set around 1900 in Grenada, Spain. Rosita is a young woman in love with a man who returns to South America to join his parents. He has sworn to Rosita that he will return. Yet her hopes gradually fade, and are shattered when told her beloved has married another.

A key moment occurs when a relative addresses the jilted woman as Dona Rosita. Dona, according to the Free Dictionary, is a "courtesy title" used to denote respect in Spanish-speaking areas.

Tech's School of Theatre and Dance was asked to produce Williams' 1979 one-act "Kirche, Kuche, Kinder (Church, Kitchen, Children)" for the 2016 Tennessee Williams Theater Festival. The visiting university performance was favorably reviewed by the New York Times, and also covered by the Huffington Post.

At the 2017 festival, Tech returned to perform Williams' 1966 one-act "The Gnadiges Faulein (The Gracious Lady)."

Call (806) 742-3603 for more information about Saturday's performance.