

CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN THEATER FESTIVAL

No ordinary house call

'The Full Catastrophe' to bring laughs, gaffes to CATF

BY JAMISON C. WEST
jwest@journal-news.net

SHEPHERDSTOWN — Though this year's Contemporary American Theater Festival will mark the world premiere of four of its five featured performances, founder and producing director Ed Herendeen doesn't believe the CATF has a bout of "world premiere-itis," as he calls it.

"It's typical for us,"

Herendeen said. "We often do plays, second productions or even third productions of new plays that are still being worked. We do new work, we produce and nurture and develop new American plays."

The CATF often examines a variety of topics and themes in its annual repertoire, and on the comedic front this year is "The Full Catastrophe," one of two plays in which Herendeen will man the director's chair. The play, based on a novel by David Carkeet, was written by Michael Weller. Weller has previously been nominated for an Academy Award and is best known for his plays "Moonchildren," "Loose Ends" and "Spoils of War."

"Michael Weller is returning for the second time. (In 2009) we produced his new play 'Fifty Words.' Michael is a well-known established American playwright," Herendeen said. "He's looking at contemporary relationships; specifically, he's examining ... the institution of marriage, contemporary marriage."

"He's really written a comic look at relationships and at the same time, it explores very real questions about communication."

In the play, the audience is introduced to Dr. Jeremy Cook (played by Tom Coiner), a linguist who has recently found himself unemployed and in a bit of a pickle. He accepts an offer

from the Pillow Agency to become a marriage counselor — but there is a twist. Instead of sitting in a comfortable office with soothing, relaxing tunes filling the background, he is sent to his

clients' house.

This is no ordinary house call, however.

"Now what makes this unique and distinctive — and, perhaps, funny — is that the Pillow

Agency embeds the marriage counselor to live with the married couple," Herendeen said. "He's hired to be the marriage counselor who will live with Dan (played by Cary Donaldson) and

Beth (played by Helen Anker) in their house. So that's very funny. He gets a room in the house, and he's there for breakfast, lunch and dinner, goes to their softball games and works on their marriage with them."

As you might imagine, situations arise over the course of the 90-minute play that will have audience members in fits.

"Perhaps many audiences will identify with many of the situations raised in the play. And by laughing at the characters in the play, it will cause them to laugh at themselves and also examine their own relationships," Herendeen said.

Though the play is comedic in nature, it conforms to the CATF's mission of generating discussion of relevant societal issues through its productions.

"We believe in contemporary new works that are immediate, that are present, that are in the now. So all five of these playwrights have written these plays in the last year," Herendeen said. "These writers, storytellers and contemporary playwrights have been listening to America, they have had their ear to the ground listening to the American landscape and they are telling five American stories that reflect the world and the American landscape that we live in."

"These plays are relevant. We believe in bringing these stories to life on stage. Each of these plays presents new ideas. Ideas are powerful, but stories are more powerful," he added.

Other cast members include Lee Sellars as Roy Pillow; and Sam Shunney and Adam Venham-Carter as Robbie. T. Ryder Smith also plays various roles in the production.

The world premiere of "The Full Catastrophe" will debut at 8:30 p.m. Saturday, July 11, in the Marinoff Theater at the Center for Contemporary Arts II, 62 W. Campus Drive, Shepherdstown.

— Assistant City Editor
Jamison C. West can be reached at 304-263-8931, ext. 135.



Weller

WORLD PREMIERE
THE FULL CATASTROPHE



A Comedy by Michael Weller
Based on the novel by David Carkeet
SPONSORED BY LYNN AND DOLORES SHIRLEY & MINA GOODRICH AND LAWRENCE DEAN