LAUGHTER ON THE 23rd FLOOR AUDITIONS!

By Neil Simon
Directed by William Irwin
Stage Manager: Kendra Babcock

WHEN
Tuesday, February 3rd, and Wednesday, February 4th, at 7:00 (No appointments)

WHERE
UM-Flint Theatre Main Stage

WHAT TO PREPARE
Theatre Majors/Minors – One contemporary comedic monologue and a brief joke.
Non-Theatre Majors will be given a selection to read at the audition.

SYNOPSIS
It’s 30 Rock meets Mad Men! Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Neil Simon provides a nostalgic peek behind the scenes of television’s golden age in this hit Broadway comedy, which is based on Simon’s own time spent on the writing staff of Sid Caesar’s Your Show of Shows. Among the mad antics in the writers’ room of a weekly variety show circa 1953, star Max Prince battles with NBC executives who fear his humor is too sophisticated for Middle America. With characters based on his co-writers, Mel Brooks, Carl Reiner and Sid Caesar, Simon showcases the hilarious jokes and banter of the original kings of comedy.

CHARACTERS

Max Prince (Star of the Max Prince show): Mid-40s to early 50s.
He exudes great strength. His strength comes more from his presence than from his actual physique. He dominates a room with his personality. You must watch him because he's like a truck you can’t get out of the way of. He is quixotic, changing quickly from warm, infectious laughter to sullen anger. Fictionalized version of Sid Caesar.

Lucas Brickman (Young New Writer): Mid 20’s to Mid 30’s
Sincere, deeply earnest and sensible. Desperate to make an impression and keep his job. Fictionalized version of Neil Simon.

Milt Fields (Lurid Joke-Smith): Mid 40’s
Milt is a gag man with roots in vaudeville and burlesque. He’s a joke-a-minute wholesaler who deals in fast paced patter. Fictionalized version of Sheldon Keller.

Val Slotsky (Uptight Head Writer, Russian): Mid 40’s
The senior member of the staff. An immigrant from Russia when he was twelve, he still carries his accent. He is the most politically aware of all the writers, making him moderate, careful and cautious. Fictionalized version of Mel Tolkin.

Brian Doyle (Stubborn, Proud Irish American): Mid-30s to mid-40s
A heavy smoker, a heavy cougher and a heavy drinker. He possesses a biting sense of humor that’s as caustic as his outlook on life. Fictionalized version of Tony Webster.

Kenny Franks (Wiz-Kid): Mid 30’s
Ivy leaguer/genius and the most sophisticated of the writers. Fictionalized versions of Larry Gelbart and Carl Reiner.

Carol Wyman (Lady powerhouse): Mid 30’s.
A strong and quick defense system that comes with being the only female writer on the staff. She has seen and heard it all. The incongruity of having a pregnant woman in this environment is not lost on her. Fictionalized version of Imogene Coca and Lucille Kallen

Helen (Max’s Secretary): Late twenties
Painfully new to show business. Struggles with how to navigate a world full of big personalities, egos and needs. Naïve, but not dumb. Attractive and fashionable.

Ira Stone (Hot Mess/Hypochondriac): Late 30s to early 40s.
A hypochondriac who comes in late every day with a new ailment. His greatest wish in life was to have a virus named after him. A completely arrogant, obnoxious, egocentric pain in the ass. Fictionalized version of Mel Brooks.

PRODUCTION DATES
First Rehearsal – Monday, February 9th, at 6:50pm
Tech Rehearsals – Sunday, March 22nd
Opening – Friday, March 27th
Closing/Strike – Saturday, April 4th

A PERUSAL SCRIPT IS AVAILABLE AT THE ‘ON RESERVE DESK’ IN THE UM-FLINT LIBRARY

Any questions? Please contact William Irwin at wirwin@umflint.edu or at 810-237-6521
DIRECTOR’S NOTES

It is no exaggeration to say that without Sid Caesar, comedy in America would have been a lot less funny. He was the star and guiding force behind Your Show of Shows and Caesar’s Hour, two of the most innovative programs in the Golden Age of Television, and the writers and stars of those shows went on to create the plays, movies, and sitcoms that we now think of as classic American comedy. So many of our greatest comedy writers—Carl Reiner, Mel Brooks, Neil Simon, Larry Gelbart, Woody Allen, Lucille Kallen, Imogene Coca—were part of Sid Caesar’s creative troupe. These people told America what is funny and set the roots for all television comedy that proceeded. Sid was a master not only of comedic performance, but also of developing characters that the audience could relate to, finding the humor in ordinary situations rather than through vaudeville-type gags. His was a comedy truly drawn from the human condition. If you want to see the groundwork of the comedy you know and love, watch some old Sid Caesar videos. If you want to learn comedy from the master, watch some old Sid Caesar videos. If you just want to laugh, watch some old Sid Caesar videos.

Playwright Neil Simon got his first big break in the early ’50s as a staff writer on Sid Caesar’s fabled television series Your Show of Shows, and this play takes a fictionalized look at Simon’s big break and the backstage chaos that went into producing one of the landmarks of television’s golden age. Max Prince, a fictionalized version of Sid Caesar, is the star of The Max Prince Show, a popular comedy-variety series that is a major hit on the East Coast, but network executives insist that it’s too sophisticated for the Midwest, and urge Prince to dumb down his act. Keeping a running commentary on the writing, fighting and wacky antics is Neil Simon’s alter-ego Lucas Brickman. Between the tensions of producing an hour of top-quality comedy each week, being pestered about his ratings and content by executives, and the pervasive fright of Senator Joe McCarthy’s Communist witch-hunts, Prince is beginning to unravel. His last line of defense against both the network and McCarthyism are his writing staff, which spends its days coming up with business for the show while hurling humorous invectives at each other and anyone else within earshot.

A year ago, the world lost Sid Caesar. And yet, some TV historians might argue that we lost him way back in the 50s, when the networks shut him down over concerns that his humor was too intellectual, and therefore over the heads of middle America. Now it’s hard to believe we’ve reached a point when some of the biggest hits on television today are reality shows that offer as their main selling point the opportunity to watch people displaying a shocking lack of civility, graciousness and class. (Well… at least it’s not over people’s heads.) Even for those of us born long after Caesar and his band of lunatics left the airwaves, it’s easy to feel nostalgia for a time when TV comedy assumed a certain level of intelligence on the part of the audience, and when smart, silly, and genuinely funny comedy ruled the day. Thanks to Neil Simon, we can still visit that time. “Long live, Hail Caesar! Whence cometh such another?”
ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

Neil Simon (playwright, born July 4, 1927, Bronx, New York) "If Broadway ever erects a monument to the patron saint of laughter, Neil Simon would have to be it," wrote Time magazine. The movies and television might consider America's most prolific and popular playwright a patron saint as well. He has written 28 plays and holds the record for the greatest number of hits in the American theater. He has had more plays adapted to film than any other playwright, and additionally has written nearly a dozen original film comedies. He helped define television comedy during the medium's legendary early days.

What's his secret? The Concise Oxford Companion to American Theatre explains: "He is a shrewd observer of human foibles and a master of the one-line gag." Emanuel Azenberg, his long-time producer, simply suggests, "He genuinely loves the act of writing."

Marvin Neil Simon grew up in Washington Heights, a product of a marriage that saw its share of turbulence. After graduating from public school, he enlisted in the Army and began his career writing for an Army camp newspaper. A week later, armistice was declared. After discharge, he returned to New York and became a mailroom clerk for Warner Brothers' East Coast office. Soon he was writing comedy revues with his brother Danny in the Poconos, then for radio, providing material for the likes of Tallulah Bankhead, and finally, for television, where he helped make Phil Silvers, Jackie Gleason, Red Buttons, Garry Moore, Sid Caesar, and Imogene Coca funny.

Caesar and Coca, of course, were the stars of "Your Show of Shows," the nation's weekly variety show addiction from 1950-54, where Simon and his brother toiled alongside fellow budding talents Woody Allen, Mel Brooks, and Larry Gelbart. But the theater was his destiny and it was there that he and his brother continued their partnership, contributing sketches to a couple of Broadway musicals in the mid-fifties. Eventually he broke out on his own and, after countless drafts, completed a comedy about two brothers who don't want to take over their father's fruit business. Come Blow Your Horn (1961) racked up 677 performances on Broadway and hinted at a promising career. Two years later, Barefoot in the Park fulfilled the promise and launched a legend.

Throughout the '60s and '70s, Simon would turn out hit after hit for the stage and screen, most of them depicting life in and about New York City -- Manhattan, Brighton Beach, Yonkers, Riverside Drive, Second Avenue, Central Park West. Think of the Simon canon -- The Odd Couple (1965), Sweet Charity (1966), Plaza Suite (1968), The Out of Towners (1970), Promises, Promises (1968), The Prisoner of Second Avenue (1971), The Goodbye Girl (1993), Chapter Two (1977) -- and you get a clear, sharp, and very funny picture of the people crazy and lucky enough to call New York home.

In the '80s Simon produced his landmark autobiographical trilogy -- Brighton Beach Memoirs (1983), Biloxi Blues (1985), and Broadway Bound (1986), which chronicled his stormy childhood, Army days, and entry into show business. Now Simon was not only getting the laughs, he was also getting the awards. He crowned this streak with Lost in Yonkers, which won the Pulitzer Price in 1991. Perhaps the secret to Simon's success is his ability, brilliantly displayed in those four plays but evident from the very beginning, to show us -- between, in, and around the funny lines -- the pain, aspiration, and sheer panic behind all those unforgettable characters. And the city which has figured so prominently in his life and work has honored him by making him the only living playwright for whom a Broadway theater is named.