



Serious about comedy

BIGFORK COMMUNITY PLAYERS

BACKSTAGE

Michele Shapero Directs *Steel Magnolias*



Alice Finlay plays Shelby.

Michele Shapero directed *The Odd Couple*, which was voted one of Bigfork's best three plays last year. This year she returns to direct *Steel Magnolias*, which is currently in rehearsal. "I fell in love with the story when I saw the movie twenty-some years ago," said Shapero. "And then I read the stage script and fell in love all over again."

The play, written by Robert Harling and inspired by the untimely death of his sister, explores relationships among a small group of southern women and how they deal with both the insignificant and the life-changing events they encounter. "It skirts the boundary between comedy and drama," says Shapero, "and that's exactly the kind of play I like to do. One where the stakes are life and death and hilarious humor is used as a tool to explore those stakes. Every-

one will laugh. Most will cry. And I hope everyone leaves feeling the better for it."

Shapero has assembled a seasoned cast. Shannon Bagely, last seen in *The Odd Couple*, plays the initially naive Annelle. Stephanie Venrick, also an *Odd Couple* veteran, plays the bride's mother, M'Lynn. Jodie Thole, in a number of Players productions including *Drinking Habits* and *Prairie Heart*, plays Truvy, the shop owner who holds it all together. Beth Kornick, best remembered as LillyBelle in *Girls of the Garden Club*, plays the recent widow, Clairee. Maggie McGunagle, a cop in last season's *Rumors*, plays the good-hearted curmudgeon, Ouiser.



Duane Herriges is the voice of the KPPD disc jockey.

And Alice Finlay, fresh out of *Exit Laughing* with the Whitefish Theater Company, plays Shelby, the center of attention in this story.

What's it like directing such a well-known story? "It offers it's own set of challenges," says Shapero. "To begin with, everyone has seen the movie and comes with their expectations for how all the characters will act. And then the actors have all seen it as well, but have their own unique twists on the characters they play. I see my job as director establishing an overall vision, keeping the story reasonably consistent with expectations. But there has to be room for creativity, both for the individual actors in their roles and for the production overall. It is not, after all, the movie. The settings are different, the cast of characters is different, and the feeling is different. I hope that those who see it will recognize it as the story they loved, but say 'that was an interesting twist I'd never seen before.' This is live theater, after all, and it should not feel like a re-showing of the movie."