

"Christmas in October" presented here

October 3, 1977

"Christmas in October," a theatrical delectation plum-full of famous letters vaudeville turns and Shakespeare's "second bananas," with a rollicking dollop of English pantomime, will be presented at 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, Oct. 14 and 15 in the Mandeville Auditorium at the University of California, San Diego.

The Christmas in this pie is one of North America's most distinguished character actors, Eric Christmas, professor of drama at UC San Diego since 1968. Christmas has worked on Broadway and in Hollywood, on radio and television and in summer festivals such as the Shakespeare season at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre. His contribution to this summer's festival were the roles of Polonius and the Gravedigger in "Hamlet" and the directing of "Timon of Athens."

Christmas says his October one-man show will be a sampler of the material he's accumulated in his four decades in theater. The program may include a few letters, some famous, all examples of fine literary style, among them one letter from Chekhov to his brother and another from Florence Nightingale describing her life in the Crimea to the folks back home. The actor says he enjoys reading letters aloud, "like one might read poems."

Since he spent many happy years in vaudeville as a singer-comedian, Christmas will pay tribute to that joyous form of entertainment, topping off the first half of the evening with some music hall numbers and his own version of "Jack in the Beanstalk" in English pantomime style.

English pantomime, Christmas offers, is unlike anything else, though somewhat akin to classical commedia dell'arte. It is a long-established form of popular theater, most often a musical play based on a fairy story and presented as a holiday entertainment. There are some conventions -- the leading young male role usually being taken by a girl and the leading female comedy role usually being taken by a man. For example, in Christmas's presentation, as Jack, he'll be a young girl playing a boy and his portrayal of Jack's mother will embrace the broad comedic overtones of a man's interpretation.

Pantomime, in the British style, has easily distinguishable exemplars of good and evil, is written in rhymed couplets and employs a lot of vaudeville performers such as jugglers and acrobats,, some of whom Christmas will interpret briefly.

The second half of the October show will be an abbreviated version of "Shakespeare's Second Bananas," in which Christmas invites the audience into his dressing room and, while making up, discusses some lesser comic characters in the Bard's plays. This shortened presentation of a longer program Christmas has offered in the past will culminate with a lingering look at Bardolph, a cockney corporal, drunkard and hanger-on, is representative of the kinds of "wonderful roles running through Shakespeare," which Christmas considers worthy of more honor than they often receive.

Tickets for both performances are \$3 for general admission and \$2 for UC San Diego students and may be purchased at the UCSD Theatre Ticket Office, 452-4574, from noon to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday.

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