

'Messiah on the Frigidaire'

Play opens tonight at Stuart's

At its heart, "Messiah on the Frigidaire" is about encountering God where we least expect to.

The play — the Athenian Players Theatre and Berean Community Players' first production of the 2008-2009 season — opens tonight at 8 at Stuart's Opera House. It centers around thirty-somethings Dwayne and Lou Ann Hightower who live in a trailer park in Elroy, S.C. When the street light comes on one night, after the neighbors' kid has trimmed the hedge, it casts a shadow that looks awfully familiar.

In a world in which the on-line auction house eBay daily sells religious images spotted in unlikely places (a pirogi said to have the image of Jesus on it sold for \$1,775), it is clear that the shadow the Hightowers have noticed has definite commercial potential. Although Lou Ann has spiritual reservations, Dwayne sees an opportunity to finally make something of himself and wants to exploit the phenomenon. With the help of Lou Ann's pragmatic best friend, "Backseat" Betsy, Dwayne promotes the "miracle" and soon crowds begin flocking to the trailer park to see and worship at the miracle that has come to pass in Elroy. However, the worshipping throng brings problems as well as opportunity.

After a lot of side-splitting fun resulting from the different approaches characters take to the "miracle," even Dwayne concludes that not everything that looks sacred is and that sometimes God may be found in very ordinary-looking circumstances. In the end, the "still, small voice" trumps the big show.

The play depicts a colorful collection of characters who live in present-day Elroy. The cast includes Lou Ann Hightower, played by Heidi Wilhelm; Dwayne Hightower, played by Corey Thompson; and "Backseat" Betsy Gridley, played by



During a rehearsal of "Messiah on the Frigidaire," Betsy Gridley (Karen Chan), left, and Lou Ann Hightower (Heidi Wilhelm) enjoy a moment of quiet after the stresses of dealing with the miraculous image discovered on the fridge.

Karen Chan. Other residents of Elroy include Lou Ann's minister, Preacher Hodges (Bruce Jones); and banker Larry Williamson (Joe Balding).

Visitors to Elroy who are attracted to what's going on at the Hightower's home include a woman, played by Sylvia Abbott; her grandson (Chaz Canter); and a mysterious stranger (Ken Bowald).

Although the action in the play takes place in South Carolina, the recorded music the audience will hear is from local musical groups. The pre-show and end of Act I music is by the Rattletrap String Band. All the rest of the music used between scenes

and during intermission is from "Fields of the Harvest," the Rarely Herd's latest CD.

"Messiah on the Frigidaire" was written by John Culbertson, a South Carolina native. It runs Thursday through Saturday at 8 p.m., and Sunday at 2 p.m. on the stage at Stuart's Opera House. The play is directed by Celeste Parsons and is geared toward audiences of all ages.

Tickets are \$10 in advance by calling the Stuart's Opera House ticket office at 753-1924 or visiting www.stuartsoperahouse.org. Tickets may also be purchased at the door for \$12 for adults and \$7 for students.