

Cape May Star and Wave

Wednesday, July 13, 2022

Cape May Stage presents 'America's Sexiest Couple'

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Special to the Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — Hailed as "America's Sexiest Couple," the co-stars in the top-ranked TV sit-com in the 1990s meet by chance 30 years later when they arrive at a hotel for the funeral of a cast member who died of COVID.

Sparks fly between the former co-stars, good ones and bad, as they try to resolve more than a quarter-century of misunderstandings and missed opportunities.

Cape May Stage presents the second show of its 2022 season, "America's Sexiest Couple," from July 13 through Aug. 14. The play is a world premiere written by Emmy Award-winning writer Ken Levine, who, at the suggestion of Roy Steinberg, the theater's artistic producing director, updated the script to be more timely. Levine has worked on numerous hit television shows, including "M*A*S*H," "Cheers," "Frasier" and "Everybody Loves Raymond."

Real-life wife and husband of 38 years, Karen Ziemba and Bill Tatum play the former TV stars. Both are well-known to Cape May

Stage audiences.

Ziemba is a Tony Award-winning Broadway actress, singer and dancer who starred in the theater's production of "Steel Magnolias" in 2011 and soloed in two of its Broadway Series shows in 2021 and 2010. Tatum has appeared in "The Shuck" (2018), "The Gin Game" (2017), "Mary, Mary" (2015) and "Moon Over Buffalo" (2014). This is the first time the couple has performed on stage together in 20 years.

The chemistry between the sit-com stars they play on stage is palpable. The question, "Will they or won't they finally get together?" hovers over them from the moment they walk on the set.

"The play is really a love story about two people who have probably always been in love, but circumstances have never really worked out for them," Tatum said.

Ziemba is superb as Susan White, a proud, disciplined actress whose early career soared and later efforts stalled as her age and gender limited job opportunities. Tatum is brilliant as Craig McAllister, a no-method actor with a quick joke and an easy laugh whose career has

been steadier and only recently begun to slow down. His latest role is doing Coke Zero commercials.

An exciting newcomer to Cape May Stage is Remy Germinario who plays an exuberant "Gen Z" bellboy at the hotel with an energy and physicality that has him bouncing off a bed and snapping rapid-fire selfies. To White and McAllister's amazement, he's never heard of the sit-com that elevated them to TV royalty. McAllister asks how that could be.

"It was always on at a bad time," he replies.

"What do you consider a tough time?" McAllister inquires.

"Before I was conceived," the bellboy explains.

Levine uses a clever device to compress the telling of the TV couple's on-air time together 30 years ago. A colleague of his, he explained, has a medical condition, Superior Autobiographical Syndrome, that allows her to accurately recall specific details of days throughout her life, down to what she ate for lunch, just by hearing the date. White suffers this affliction in the play, and McAllister plumbs their history together simply by



Provided

Bill Tatum, Roy Steinberg, Ken Levine, Karen Ziemba and Remy Germinario are among the cast and crew of the Cape May Stage production of 'America's Sexiest Couple.'

calling out key dates.

"I knew there was going to be a lot of talk about the past in the play since they

hadn't seen each other for so long, so I needed a novel device to get in and out of the past, so it wasn't just,

'Remember the time we did this or that,'" Levine said.

It works well. The couple laugh, hug, yell and fight as they wander down memory lane and it becomes increasingly clear that they still have strong feelings for one another. What isn't clear for much of the play is whether they will act on them.

The plot twists when they're in the midst of parting on unsettled terms. Both get calls from their agents informing them that CBS, shocked by the media's renewed interest in the show ignited by the cast member's death, wants to do a reboot, provided that both co-stars reprise their roles.

Do they do the show? Does the fabled couple finally get their happily-ever-after ending? To find out if true love is in the stars, call (609) 884-1341 or visit capemay-stage.org to purchase tickets to see the show.