

# 'Li'l Abner'

## Take a musical journey to Dogpatch

**R**emember the Sadie Hawkins Day Dance back in high school? That was the one where each girl got to invite the boy of her dreams, rather than having to wait for him to notice her. Sadie Hawkins Day was the invention of cartoonist Al Capp, creator of the popular comic strip "Li'l Abner."

Area residents can enjoy the Broadway musical version of "Li'l Abner" at Stuart's Opera House on Friday and Saturday and March 13 and 14 at 8 p.m., plus there will be a matinee performance at 2 p.m. on Sunday.

Athenian Players Theatre and Berean Community Players are producing the show with sponsorship from Hocking Valley Bank.

Like the cartoon, the play features the town of Dogpatch, U.S.A., whose citizens are mostly either Yokums or Scraggs. Mammy and Pappy Yokum (Linda Watkins and Charlie Smith) have a handsome and wholesome son, Abner Yokum (Aaron Elsaesser), who is more interested in fishing than in returning the affections of the beautiful Daisy Mae Scragg (Emily Maluski). The romantic plot is complicated by a government plan to use Dogpatch for nuclear testing. Dogpatch has been identified as the most worthless place in America, so there will be no loss if it is blown up. The Dogpatchers try to save their town by showing the things that make it special

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Photo courtesy Morristowne Photography

**Marryin' Sam (Joe Balding) center, leads Daisy Mae (Emily Maluski), Li'l Abner (Aaron Elsaesser) and the rest of the Dogpatchers in singing "Jubilation T. Cornpone" during a dress rehearsal of "Li'l Abner." The Athenian Players Theatre and Berean Community Players production opens Friday at Stuart's Opera House.**

to them. In the process, the government learns about Mammy Yokum's Yokumerry Tonic — a wonder drug that builds muscular bodies.

News of the tonic reaches General Bullmoose (Dean Barker), an extreme capitalist, whose childhood dream is to own all the money in the world. To get the tonic, Bullmoose sends Appassionata Von Climax (Dianna Jarvis) to enter the annual Sadie Hawkins Day race, where a woman can marry whatever man she catches. With the connivance of Evil Eye Fleagle (Sam Witmer), Appassionata plans to catch and marry Abner in a ceremony performed by Marryin' Sam (Joe Balding).

After the wedding, Abner's suicide will be "arranged." Daisy Mae has to catch Abner first, while managing not to catch "The World's Dirtiest Wrassler," the amorous Earthquake McGoon (David Whealey).

The Sadie Hawkins Day race is made more challenging for the men because, for a price, Available Jones (Chris Neumann) has procured the services of a cousin, Stupefyin' Jones (Valerie Schrader). Stupefyin' is so petrifyingly, drop-dead gorgeous that men who get a glimpse of her literally freeze dead in their tracks, making them easy targets for the women who are chasing them.

The Broadway show, which

opened in 1956, needed more than 60 actors to play all of Al Capp's comic characters. In order to meet the requirements of the story with the available resources, the show at Stuart's has nine actors who will display their talents in multiple roles: Quenna Stewart, Sam Witmer, Valerie Schrader, Alison Bartlett, Jane Adams, Chaz Canter, B.J. Heidlebaugh, Bruce Jones and Suzanne Ragg. Even members of the orchestra will help out by playing members of the notorious Scragg clan in some scenes. Additional parts are played by Neal Nesbitt, Sandy Russell, Roger Springer, Colin Hull, Dan Yeatts, Mackenzie Perry and Courtney Hull.