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COURTESY PHOTO

"A Day in Hollywood/A Night in the Ukraine" is currently playing at Roxy's Downtown.

## Roxy's newest show salutes Marx Brothers

BY DAVID BURKE  
*Eagle correspondent*

Little did Rick Bumgardner know when he was casting for a Groucho Marx role in the Roxy's Downtown musical "A Day in Hollywood/A Night in the Ukraine" that he was right in John Keckeisen's wheelhouse.

"Marx Brothers has really been part of my upbringing," the actor said. "My grandfather was a huge Marx Brothers fan - he would sing my sister and I lullabies at night that were Groucho Marx songs. That's probably where I got my weird sense of humor from."

The musical comedy, which opened this week for 12 performances, devotes its second act to what Bumgardner calls "a live Marx Brothers movie with music."

Keckeisen, though, was originally cast in the Chico role with Shaun-Michael Morse as Groucho. When an adept piano player was needed as Chico, Morse suggested the two trade roles.

"It's been a real treat to

### 'A Day in Hollywood/A Night in the Ukraine'

**When:** Through Sunday, March 22; performances at 7 p.m. Wednesdays, 8 p.m. Thursdays-Fridays, 2 and 4 p.m. Saturdays and 6 p.m. Sundays

**Where:** Roxy's Downtown, 412 ½ E. Douglas

**Tickets:** \$25-\$30, from [roxysdowntown.com](http://roxysdowntown.com) or 316-265-4400

be able to dive into this role and get to relive those wonderful memories and pay tribute to one of my idols - and hopefully do him justice," Keckeisen said.

A nine-time Tony Award nominee (winning for featured actress and choreography, the latter for director Tommy Tune) 40 years ago, "A Day in Hollywood/A Night in the

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"Ukraine" is essentially two one-act musicals.

The first act, Bumgardner said, is "a tribute to the heyday of Hollywood films and musicals, and the stars associated with those," complete with celebrity impersonations, and the second is the Marx shenanigans. All eight performers in the Roxy's rendition play multiple characters.

Bumgardner said the show has been "near and dear to my heart" since he was in grad school at the University of Connecticut.

"I've always wanted to bring it to other people just for the style of the show, the acting challenge," he said. "Every single one of these eight people have to be triple-threats - they act, sing, dance and three of them have to do spot-on, perfect imitations, which takes it even further."

The first act, set in the 1930s, includes tapping, Bumgardner's "favorite

dance form."

"Getting to watch that is nothing but a joy," he said. The second act is "farcical," he said - "It's just my humor - it's dry, it's witty, it's bawdy. It's just a lot of fun."

The Harpo role in "Ukraine" is written for a female, with Briley Meek in the part for Roxy's. Like the movie Harpo, the character is silent.

"He does have a lot of physical action, and fortunately I've been able to work a lot of physical comedy into my performance career," Meek said. "It's been very fun to hone in this role."

In the script, Keckeisen said, "she has these outlines of actions that she follows, which are so detailed and so amazing."

Being silent, Meek said, forces her to be "very, very clear and distinct in my choices. While the script does give me a map for where I'm going, the choices need to be very,

very clear so the audience is aware of all of the thoughts going on in my character's head."

The three, all Wichita theater veterans, have worked in pairs but not together, they said. Their rapport helps in the technically difficult farce.

"With any comedy, it takes a lot of rehearsal," Meek said. "You have to work with your fellow actors, you have to make sure everyone is in the same mindset. With comedy, in order to be clean and get the laughs, it takes a lot of work no matter how good somebody is."

Having an audience laughter adds to the dynamic, Keckeisen and Morse said.

"There's a rhythm to the lines, and when the audience comes, the laughs play a part in that rhythm that we have to get used to," Keckeisen said.

"That rhythm evolves night after night with that," Morse said. "It's all about being present and being in the moment with your fellow actors and making sure you're all on the same page."