

Roxy's Downtown opens its Christmas comedy this weekend

BY DAVID BURKE
Eagle correspondent

Rick Bumgardner returns to a familiar showbiz axiom – the one about the show and how it must go on – frequently when talking about the latest developments in “A Tuna Christmas,” which opens this weekend at Roxy’s Downtown.

Three days before the opening of the two-man comedy, actor Allan Baker, a Wichita native returning to the stage in his hometown for the first time in 26 years, announced he was

leaving the show for numerous reasons, Bumgardner said.

“He decided for his own comfort level that he probably should not be doing the production,” Bumgardner, Roxy’s artistic director and the show’s director, said. “He decided it was not in his best interest nor Roxy’s best interest if he would continue doing the show.”

Bumgardner didn’t take any time in finding a replacement to act alongside Tom Frye. He cast himself.

“I’m familiar with how this works, and I’m the director of the piece,” the

veteran performer said. “I’ve researched and discovered and watched. I’m the natural person to step into the role.”

Bumgardner had been the understudy for a Kansas City run of “Greater Tuna,” the first in the series of four, two-man comedies about eccentric small-town Texans – but his roles were the ones acted by Frye.

Interviewed Tuesday, Bumgardner was busy making recipe cards that Bertha, one of his characters, could carry with cues for his lines.

But he said he’s not



Courtesy photo

Rick Bumgardner, left, and Tom Frye star in “A Tuna Christmas,” which opens this weekend at Roxy’s Downtown.

worried about making mistakes.

“Our audiences are very forgiving, and they love it when the actors screw up anyway,” he said. “That was one of their favorite parts about ‘Golden Girls.’”

Frye directed “Greater Tuna” about 25 years ago in Ohio, as well as the patriotic “Red, White and Tuna” and a version of “Greater Tuna” at Wichita State.

He said the most difficult part was remembering the entire script.

“There’s about a million lines. We both have the same amount of lines, which is all the lines in the show,” Frye said. “We’re waiting for the show to open so we can breathe.”

Bumgardner said he was full of adrenaline leading up to opening night.

“Truthfully, I have a great deal of excitement about it,” he said. “It’s been five or six years since I’ve been on the stage, so getting back on the stage

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Vespestad and Monte Riegel Wheeler.

Bumgardner said he offered the two “Tuna Christmas,” but Wheeler was busy as the new co-owner of Mosely Street Melodrama and Vespestad was not a fan of the “Tuna” franchise, Bumgardner said. Vespestad is performer and choreographer of the Christmas variety show that opens next week at Crown Uptown Theatre, and “Kyle & Monte Christmas” is scheduled for the holiday season at Roxy’s in 2020.

Bumgardner said “Tuna Christmas” was a logical choice for the holidays.

“It’s very, very funny, but it’s also very, very touching and very, very poignant with a good Christmas message,” he said.

Between the two actors and their 22 characters, there are about 50 costume changes, Bumgardner said.

Each actor has two theater dressers standing by backstage, he said, while a fifth crew member swings back and forth between the two after wrangling a variety of Christmas trees.

Bumgardner said that with any “Tuna” show, there is more action off stage than on.

“The real show is what happens backstage,” he said. “If we could watch that and film that, it would be an incredible thing to show an audience.”

“A Tuna Christmas”

What: Christmas play centering on a small town’s annual Christmas yard display contest.

When: Thursdays-Sundays, Nov. 14-Dec. 22 with Wednesday performances in December

Where: Roxy’s Downtown, 412 E. Douglas

Tickets: \$10-\$30.

Information:
<http://www.roxysdowntown.com/>

will be a good thing for me. Our season ticket holders have been asking when they were going to see me on stage, and I’ve told them, ‘It’s coming, it’s coming.’”

Roxy’s made a change in holiday plans after three years of a Christmas variety show hosted by Kyle

Christmas

with Earnest Alexander

featuring Craig Curry, East High Concert Choir and other local talent

DEC

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DOORS OPEN AT

6 p.m.

<p style="font-weight: bold; margin: 0;">DINNER & CONCERT</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em; margin: 0;">Presented by Youth Horizons</p>	<p style="font-weight: bold; margin: 0;">CROWN UPTOWN</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em; margin: 0;">2207 E. Douglas Ave. Wichita, KS</p>
<p style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold; margin: 0;">\$50</p> <p style="font-weight: bold; margin: 0;">GENERAL ADMISSION TICKETS</p>	<p style="font-size: 0.8em; margin: 0;">Available through Crown Uptown Box Office</p> <p style="font-weight: bold; margin: 0;">316.612.7696</p>

Youth Horizons' mission is to empower children and their families to become healthy, productive members of our community and to create a nationwide awareness for the needs of at-risk youth. Find out more: YouthHorizons.net

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