

# Comedy, dance all part of Roxy's latest

BY DAVID BURKE  
*Eagle correspondent*

Early last year, Gina Austin was excited to take the stage at Roxy's Downtown in the supporting role of the main character's mother in the musical "Kiss of the Spider Woman."

But the coronavirus pandemic wiped that show, and all of the other big musicals, off the Roxy's schedule.

"She was quite bummed, if you want to know the truth," artistic director Rick Bumgardner recalled.

But soon Austin, a Wichita theater veteran, found solace in the script for "Six Dance Lessons in Six Weeks," a two-person play suggested by Bumgardner by two of Roxy's regular patrons.



Austin  
Ragusin

"I just thought, 'Oh my gosh, this is just a perfect show for Roxy's Downtown,'" Bumgardner said.

"It's a comedy, but not. It's just really good."

The play has only two characters: Lily, the widow of a Baptist minister, and Michael, a gay dance instructor hired to give her dancing lessons.

Austin was equally thrilled with the role of Lily, a Baptist minister's wife.



Gina Austin

"It's a very nice role, and it's a very sweet little story. It's a woman my age and there are some similarities," she said.

She read the script and immediately told Bumgardner, "I certainly hope COVID ends so we can do this lovely show."

"Gina was always my first choice to do this, because she is this character," he said of Austin, a 30-year veteran drama teacher at Wichita West with another 10 years at Butler County Community College. "She just was the epitome of who I saw doing this part."

"Six Dance Lessons in Six Weeks" runs March 11-28.

The actor to play Michael, the dance instructor, needed to have "the dance capability and the chutzpah to pull off the character," Bumgardner said. He could only think of two, and one of them was Austin Ragusin.

Ragusin had to make two adjustments to the character. One was to make the 22-year-old appear 35 and the other was that "he has to move like a gay dancer, and that's totally foreign to this young man," Ragusin said.

Ragusin said he didn't consider himself a good dancer, but

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his “enthusiasm covers for the technique.”

The choreographer for the show is Courtney Wages, graduating from Wichita State this May with a BFA in musical theater – and Ragusin’s girlfriend.

“She’s always kind of telling me what to do and stuff. This wasn’t too different,” Ragusin said of having her as the choreographer.

Austin said the ballroom-style dancing wasn’t foreign to her, after years of musical theater, and

that she still takes twice-weekly, one-hour-and-45-minute ballet classes.

“Six Dance Lessons in Six Weeks” debuted in Los Angeles in 2001, starring screen legend Uta Hagen and Emmy-winner David Hyde-Pierce. On Broadway, it starred Polly Bergen and Mark Hamill, and was made into a movie in 2014.

It is set in Lily’s 25th-floor condo in St. Petersburg, Florida, overlooking the Gulf of Mexico.

That’s where the set design by Michael Downs

and the lighting by Arthur Reese become a third character, Bumgardner said.

“At the end of every scene is the two of them (Lily and Michael) dancing silhouetted in the lighting of that window,” he said.

The two characters have a rocky relationship, Ragusin said.

“They’re either joking about something or arguing,” he said. “They never stay on one emotion too long. It’s just like real life.”

Bumgardner said the two are “two completely different human beings with an unlikely bond.”

“They’re both at places

in their life where they need a connection,” he said.

“There might be a couple of teary moments in the show, but it is for the most part a comedy,” Bumgardner said. “It’s one of those ‘we love to argue and fight comedies,’ and that’s what makes us laugh.”

## ‘SIX DANCE LESSONS IN SIX WEEKS’

**When:** March 11-28; 8 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays, 2 p.m. Sundays

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

**Tickets:** \$30, available by calling 316-265-4400