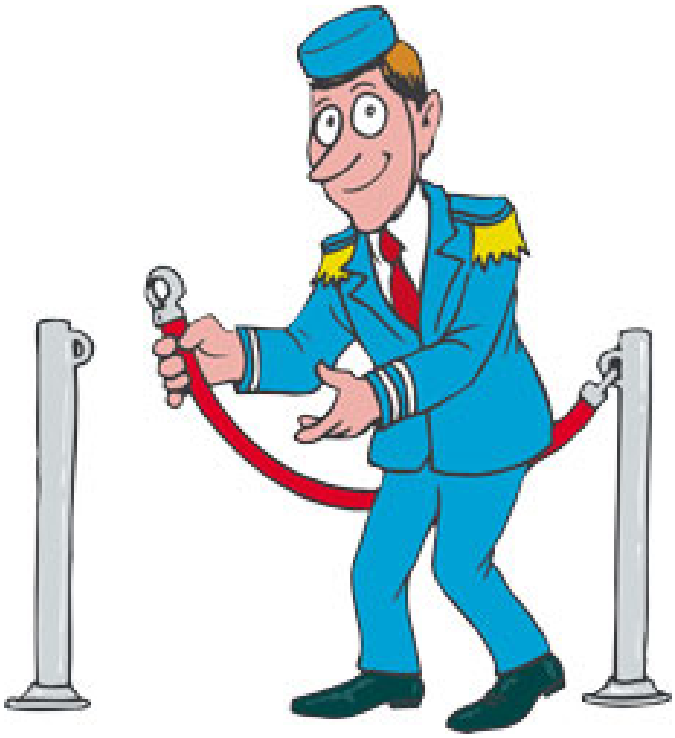
FRONT ROW CENTER

By Michael Warren

The Foreigner
By Larry Shue
Directed by Larry King



The Foreigner is a hokey comedy set in a fishing resort in the backwoods of Georgia. The play had some success in an off-Broadway production in 1984-86, and eventually won two Obie Awards and two Outer Critics Circle Awards, including Best New American Play and Best Off-Broadway Production.

The comedy revolves around “Charlie Baker” who is so pathologically shy that he is unable to

make conversation. In order to avoid problems, his English friend “Froggy LeSueur” explains that his companion comes from a strange country and cannot speak a word of English. Roger Larson is very good as Charlie who gradually gains confidence during the play, and he has an excellent scene in telling a story in fluent Gobbledygook. Meanwhile, Dave McIntosh gave us his best Cockney as the bomb disposal expert Staff Sergeant Froggy.

Before long, Charlie finds that other visitors discuss secrets and scandals in front of him while he sits mute or says one phrase – “Thank you.” Florette Schnelle plays a young blonde as “Catherine Simms,” a rich and beautiful heiress who is courted by “Reverend David Lee,” a dishonest preacher who is after her money. Jon DeYoung is suitably slimy and two-faced as the Reverend, while Florette is cute and innocent in her Daisy Mae role. Her brother “Ellard” (convincingly played by Jack Vanesko) is a simple boy who tries to teach Charlie how to speak English – or what passes for English in backwoods Georgia.

Meanwhile, mean and nasty “Owen Musser” (played with pent-up rage by John Foster) plans to oust sweet home-owner “Betty Meeks” and convert the lodge into a meeting place for the Ku Klux Klan. The Klansmen are not too smart – they fall for a clever trick with Charlie doing a voodoo performance, using a neat special effect that involves the new trapdoor. And Betty Lloyd Robinson enjoys herself and gives a great performance as Mrs. Meeks, being motherly to Charlie and making tea and scrambled eggs and hominy grits for him and for Ellard.

These characters are such ridiculous stereotypes that the play cannot be taken seriously, and indeed the audience sat back and enjoyed this unusual farce. At the same time, the author makes some subtle points about the value of silence. Larry King had an excellent cast, and moved the action along emphasizing the farcical element. As a result, this production was very entertaining, although at times some of the Georgia accents sounded phony. It can be a problem for local actors to perform plausibly and audibly in a different accent, and I couldn’t always understand the dialog. I saw the play twice, and on the second occasion the first act was at least 10 minutes shorter. The pace really improved between the preview and the show I saw a week later. I congratulate the director and all the cast, and in particular Roger Larson who gave a virtuoso performance as Charlie. I should also mention the curtain call ‘boos’ that greeted the bad guys, played by John Foster and Jon de Young – a tribute to their realistic nastiness.

The set design (by Alex Pinkerton) was clever and attractive, and I also appreciated the imaginative set decoration by Lori and Brad Dobko. Thanks to Stage Manager Kathleen Neal and all the crew for good work backstage, and thanks again to Larry King and the cast for a solid performance. So ends another successful and entertaining season with good acting and

directing and a lot of laughs. I look forward to Season 47, which opens on October 1st with *The Kitchen Witches*
by Caroline Smith, directed by Roger Tredway. And so farewell – have a great summer!