

Knee Deep in GUMBO

Premier performances November 17-19 of *Gumbo Bottoms*, a musical by Meredith Ludwig and Cathy Barton, played to capacity crowds and standing ovations at Turner Hall in Boonville. The production was the result of more than a yearlong collaboration between Cathy and Meredith and a product of field collection project Meredith conducted along the Missouri River for the Missouri River Communities Network. For her first-ever musical, Cathy wrote a dozen songs calling for string band accompaniment and a few set to traditional melodies. Turner Hall was packed with

A New Missouri River Musical
By Meredith Ludwig and Cathy Barton

GUMBO BOTTOMS



**Friday & Saturday,
November 17th & 18th at 8:00 PM
& Sunday, November 19th at 2:00 PM**

Turner Hall - 518 Vine Street, Boonville MO

**Adults - \$8.00
Seniors & Students with ID - \$6.00**

*Advance tickets available at Family Shoe Store,
407 Main Street, Boonville MO*

Tickets & Reservations call 660-882-2268

sponsored by Turner Hall River Rats for the Arts

people, most of whom had supported the arts community in town and Dave and Cathy for years.

The play came together awfully fast once the revisions were done, the result of two public readings of the script and songs in May and September. Five of the six cast members had less than four weeks to rehearse, and the sixth had even less time. A band and sets had to be pulled together as well to solve some tricky staging situations.

“Go see Tall Paul at the Sports Shop on Hwy 5. He’ll fix you up,” David Oswald told Deb Jewett when she was at a loss as to where she would find a fishing net for the upcoming production of *Gumbo Bottoms*. The trammel net they had borrowed from true- to-life fisherman, Joe Reeder, had proven to be more than the actors could handle. Oswald, owner of Turner Hall in Boonville and the technical director for the show, was busy installing conduit, while

Christopher Bolin, scenic designer, painted the shanty boat. Doug Elley was pondering the “HOTEL” signage, studying lettering styles from the 20’s. Brenda Bestgen was listening to owl hoots and coyote sound effects while writer/director, Meredith Ludwig, adjusted the hooks on the fishing lines. “Don’t worry. We’re leaving a lot up to the imagination!” The “workshop production” was sponsored by Turner Hall River Rats for the Arts, whose members comprised most of the cast and crew. It was the third step in the new play development process to get the show “on its feet” to see how it worked in front of an audience. “We’re putting this together on a wing and a prayer and the generous support of the Rats,” said Ludwig. With a limited budget, the group has adopted a minimal approach to the production.

Deb Jewett came back with three minnow nets and began the tiresome process of sewing them into one and distressing the entire thing to make it look like it wasn’t straight out of the package. “Tall Paul gave us the night crawlers and a gigging pole!” Having already constructed a catfish from hardware cloth and panty hose, this was great

news. Anyone who has ever worked on a theatrical production understands the countless hours that go into an endeavor such as this.

Lesley Oswald, who plays the character, Vivian Marks, and Lou Thompson, who has taken the role of Lucy Taylor, were heading out the door to rehearse their lines. “It’s a tremendous amount of hard work, but we’re having blast,” said Oswald. Thompson grinned big and said, “We sure are. Now if I can just get those dance moves learned to “Wiley, Guiley, Mighty Mo.” She was referring to just one of the 12 songs Cathy Barton has created for the show. Dave Para has been busy too, transcribing the songs and serving as musical director. “It’s so exciting for me to hear other voices sing these songs,” Barton said. Ludwig and Barton have been working on *Gumbo Bottoms* since the summer of 2005. Inspired by stories Ludwig and Kate Gorman collected along the river for the Missouri River Communities Network, the musical takes place in 1928 and follows the misadventures of Vivian Marks who has discovered all she has left of her family fortune is a piece of bottomland in Missouri. The musical promises lots of laughs and a chance to see this new work in its infancy.