

AGGIELIFE

THE BATTALION

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'Foreigner' in town

Duo from Tuna, TX trilogy joins a full cast at this weekend's OPAS show

By Allison Brown
THE BATTALION

It all began more than 30 years ago when a young man, just one year out of college, was offered a job in Texas. After a year of auditioning and working in New York, the Oklahoman willingly accepted a government job in San Antonio working for an arts program. It was there that Joe Sears, co-author and co-star of the Tuna trilogy, met his soon-to-be partner-in-crime Jaston Williams.

"I met Jaston Williams in 1973, and we became laughing buddies," Sears said. "We've been making each other laugh for 30 years and we are still friends."

The pair of friends started putting together their first show, "Greater Tuna," in 1980. It was a good base for a working relationship, Sears said.

The Tuna Trilogy, which includes "Greater Tuna," "A Tuna Christmas" and "Red, White and Tuna" is a series of two-man shows in which Sears and Williams portray all of the zany citizens of a small Texas town. Over the past three years, MSC OPAS brought each of these shows to College Station. This year, the duo returns with a full cast to begin the OPAS lineup for its tour of Larry Shue's comedy, "The Foreigner."

"One of the things the program advisory committee tries to do, especially for a season-opening show, is find something with wide appeal, something that will give us a bang to start with," said Eric Lee, a senior communication and English double major and chair of MSC OPAS. "We saw the chance to get the guys of Tuna, (who) have been a success here, so we jumped on that."

Sears said he is looking forward to returning to Aggieland. He grew up in a family that had an agricultural background, and when he moved to Texas, he said he felt a connection with A&M, despite living in Austin.

"The Aggies are my favorite team," he said. "I've been an Aggie fan ever since I moved to Texas, but I just can't tell all the t-spigs in Austin that."

Sears, who has performed for Robin Williams and former president George H.W. Bush, said he knows college students are a group that does not normally go to the theater, but takes pride in the fact that they come to their shows. He said he hopes the experience will encourage them to go see another play.

He also said he enjoys performing for Texans in general because they have a great sense of humor.

"Texans have a Texas-sized sense of humor. They will be the first to laugh at themselves, which sets them apart and makes them unique," he said. "The ability to laugh at ourselves makes us content in living where we live. I found my niche in Central Texas and I'm very happy."

Though they are meant in fun, the jokes can sometimes get the duo into trouble. Sears does a joke in "Greater Tuna" about one of

his characters, Aunt Pearl, and a woman he greatly admires, Barbara Bush, saying the two women can't go to Medina County in print dresses because they'll get crop-dusted. It seems a Texas-sized sense of humor is overpowered by a Texas-sized sense of loyalty when the jokes are directed at someone's mom.

"The print dresses joke is one of my favorites, but George W. got on me for making fun of his mother, as any good Texas boy would do," Sears said.

Sears and Williams have been touring in "The Foreigner" off and on for 12 years. Williams plays a shy Englishman, Charlie, who goes to a small town in Georgia to reflect on his life. Charlie pretends to be a foreigner who doesn't speak English. Sears plays Betty Meeks, the innkeeper at Charlie's lodge. A hilarious plot ensues when the locals start unveiling their secrets and plots in front of him, believing he cannot understand English.

"The show is truly hilarious," Lee said. "We say 'laugh-out-loud funny' in our advertising, but it truly is... the antics that these guys go through will leave you literally rolling on the floor."

Unlike the Tuna Trilogy, this show features an ensemble cast handpicked to work with Williams and Sears, who said he thinks the show itself is one of the funniest comedies ever written.

"It's not as well known, but I think it will be very successful here," said James Tyler, a senior chemistry major and vice chair of MSC OPAS.

In his first tour of "The Foreigner," Sears played the villain, a member of the Ku Klux Klan. For the following tours he portrayed Betty Meeks because the actress who played her was unavailable for the tour. He said he loves both characters, but enjoys playing Betty because she gets more laughs.

"I went from playing the ugliest character to the sweetest character, which is either a mark of insanity or trust in my own talent," Sears said. "I have always said that controlled schizophrenia is half of being a good actor."

Between "Tuna" and "The Foreigner," Sears has spent a lot of time playing women on stage. He said it is more of a challenge in the current show because he has to be a woman the whole time, which makes him conscious of how he holds his hands and how he stands. He said he has to stay clean-shaven and trimmed to give the illusion of femininity.

"I'm lucky I'm a blond-haired man. If I was a dark-haired man I'd be in trouble," he said. "Having to shave below the neck would be a major itch attack, and I'm not going through that, even for the play."

Though making audiences around the country keel over with laughter is a personal triumph for Sears, there is one joy in his life that far outweighs the rest: his 9-year-old granddaughter.

Of all of the roles Sears has played, his favorite is the one he least expected.

"I never expected to be a grandpa, but it's the greatest thing that ever happened to me," he said.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MSC OPAS/SOLOSHOE COMMUNICATIONS

Jaston Williams and Joe Sears, stars of the Tuna, Texas trilogy are joined by a full cast for Larry Shue's off-Broadway comedy "The Foreigner," scenes from which are shown above. Williams has received Washington, D.C.'s Helen Hayes Award nominations for "A Tuna Christmas" and "Red, White and Tuna" as well as the San Francisco Bay Area Critics Award for "Greater Tuna." Sears received a Tony Award-nomination for Best Actor in a Play in 1995 for "A Tuna Christmas," which was nominated for Best Play.

The Tuna Guys Perform Tonight!

Don't Miss them in The Foreigner, a hilarious hit!

"Best show I've seen since A Chorus Line!"
Charlene, Tuna, Texas

"I swear...even our sheep were laughing!"
Aunt Pearl, Tuna, Texas

"I laughed so hard, I dropped my cigarette."
Didi Snavelly, Tuna, Texas



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See those hilarious Tuna guys as you have never seen them before!

Jaston Williams and Joe Sears, joined by a full cast, will open the 2004-2005 OPAS season with Larry Shue's hit comedy THE FOREIGNER. If Sears and Williams kept you in stitches as the outrageous characters of Tuna, you won't believe the side-splitting hilarity brought on when joined by five other comedic actors!

THE FOREIGNER

Starring Jaston Williams & Joe Sears (stars of the Tuna Trilogy) joined by five other comedic actors!
**Friday & Saturday, September 24 & 25
7:30 PM in Rudder Auditorium**

* Available in balcony seating only. Limited number of tickets available for each performance. Discount valid at MSC Box Office only. TAMU student ID required. Limit two tickets per student per performance. Not valid for tickets already purchased. Offer expires September 25, 2004.

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8pm -midnight

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