

Brian Guehring  
Omaha Theatre Company for Young People  
2001 Farnam St., Omaha, NE 68102  
(402) 502-4636  
bguehring@aol.com

**LARGER THAN LIFE!**  
**Great American Tall Tale Heroes**  
by Brian Guehring  
a play for a between 5 and 30 actors

PROFESSOR POPPLE  
and his traveling troupe of amazing actors presents:  
PROFESSOR POPPLE'S LARGER THAN LIFE  
HEROES AND HEROINES OF AMERICANA SHOW  
(this traveling show touring America is set around the turn of the century)

Act 1: SAL FINK, the Mississippi Screamer!  
set along the Mississippi River between 1820-1840  
SAL FINK the rootinist, tootinist gal you ever met  
MIKE FINK Sal's braggadocio keelboatin father  
TOWNSWOMAN, BUSINESSMEN, TRAVELER Pioneers riding on keelboat  
BANDITS (4) evil, no good kidnappin villains

Act 2: JOHN HENRY, steel drivin man  
Southern Plantation and West Virginia Railroad between 1850-1870  
JOHN HENRY big, strong African American hero  
MAMA his strong mother  
LUCY his loyal wife  
OVERSEER plantation overseer of slaves  
LIL' BILL John's shaker  
BOSS boss of the railroad crew  
SALESMAN inventor of the steel driving machine

Act 3: PAUL BUNYAN, king-sized log-cutter  
Maine and Great Lakes area between 1870-1900  
PAUL BUNYAN King-sized lumberjack  
BABE Paul's blue ox  
OLAF, BIG JOE, SVEN lumberjacks  
SOURDOUGH the cook  
MAW, PAW, NEIGHBORS Maine Residents

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**LARGER THAN LIFE!**  
**Great American Tall Tale Heroes**  
by Brian Guehring

Larger Than Life! Great American Tall Tale Heroes was originally produced in April 2002 the mainstage of the Omaha Theater Company for Young People. The original production team and cast were the following:

Act 2	Act 3		Act 1
Popple/Bandit 1	Worker/Salesman	Susan Clement Toberer as Prof.	
Laura Marr as	Sal Fink	Neighbor 5/Babe/Olaf	
Vincent Alston as		Lil Bill	Maw/Big Joe
Paw/Neighbor 5/ Sven		Business Man 1/Bandit 3	John Henry
Kevin Ehrhart as		Mike Fink/Business Man 2/Bandit 4	Overseer/Chief
Bunyan			
Diane Bulan as	Annie/Townswoman/Traveler/Bandit 2	Mama/Lucy	Neighbors 1-4/Sourdough

Director: Dr. James Larson  
Costume Design: Sherri Geerdes  
Stage Manager: Chris Wiig  
Fight Choreographer: Kevin Barratt

Set Design: Eric Voecks  
Light Design: Anne Baker  
Dramaturgy: Michael Miller  
Original Music: Kevin Hill

PRE-SHOW:

( The main curtain is a title drop with PROFESSOR POPPLE's LARGER THAN LIFE GREAT Heroes and Heroines OF AMERICANA SHOW written in old style lettering. It describes the show as "refined", "legitimate", and such.

The show begins with the ballyhoo flamboyant means of attracting attention to the show. The actors come on stage doing some turn of the century vaudeville mini-acts: soft shoe juggling, acrobatics, strong man demonstrations, etc. We are at a performance of a traveling troupe from the early 1900's {like medicine shows, vaudeville productions, carnival side shows, etc.}. These are all very patriotic in nature and ends with the cast waving mini-flags.)

ALL

God Bless America!

(PROFESSOR POPPLE comes down as cast exits. A new Drop with the American map of 1905 comes down)

PROFESSOR POPPLE

We'd like to welcome you, one and all to Professor Popple's Larger than Life Great Heroes and Heroines of Americana Show. My spectacle has entranced, entertained, and wowed audiences all over our 45 states and we're here to do the same for ya'll. So sit back and enjoy the show as we introduce you to 3 of America's greatest heroes and heroines in our history as they overcome impossible odds, incredible obstacles, and Mother Nature herself. You'll be amazed, astounded, and confounded by these spectacular feats of strength, smarts, and sheer determination. You'll be grateful for their courage, honesty, and hard work that helped make this country as great as it is. These men and women will make you proud to be an American.

The first heroine ya'll get to meet is the ring-tail roarer Sal Fink! The incredible keelboater poled, bushwacked, and warped her way up and down the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers from 1815-1830 helping tame those rivers into the easy means of transportation they are here in 1905.

(ANNIE points out the area on the map)

ANNIE

And yet, at first her daddy didn't think she could do it.

PROFESSOR POPPLE

No, he didn't, but I think ya'll should see for yourself. So with no further ado, let's get on with the show. Professor Popple's Larger than Life Great Heroes and Heroines of Americana Show presents The Story of Sal Fink, Mississippi Screamer!

ACT 1: Sal Fink  
(A new sign comes on: THE ADVENTURES OF SAL FINK, Mississippi Screamer! A two dimensional background comes in to create the River area. SAL, a red headed tomboy, young girl of 12 is waving excitedly as her father, the famous keelsboatman MIKE, “poles” home in his two dimensional boat)

SAL  
Oh, Pa, its so good to have you home! You’ve been gone a long time!

MIKE  
Its hard work polin’, paddlin’, and pullin my keelboat “Lil’ Sal” up the Mississippi.

SAL  
That’s why you’re the best keelboatsman on the Mississippi.

MIKE  
Yep, I’m a muddy water bawler!

SAL  
A salt river caterwauler!

MIKE  
I’m a reg’lar hollerer

SAL  
from the ol’ Mississip’.

MIKE  
I love my keelboat!

SAL  
You love your daughter!

MIKE  
And I’m strong as iron an chockful o’ fight.

SAL  
You’re half wild panther

MIKE  
an half sneaky weasel

SAL  
and the rest of you is snappin turtle bite.

MIKE  
I can outrun,

Outjump, SAL

Outshoot, MIKE

Outbrag, SAL

Outspit, MIKE

Out fight, rough 'n' tumble, no holds barred, any man on both sides the river from Pittsbui to New Orleans. BOTH

Cock-a-doodle-do! MIKE

Cock-a doodle-do! SAL

Cock-a-doodle-do. BOTH

Well, its time for me to be off again. MIKE

Oh, I want to be a keelboat woman more than anythin. Let me go with you, Pa! SAL

That's cute, darlin'. But you're just a little girl of 12. You're too helpless to be a keelboatsman. MIKE

But, Pa, I'm not helpless. I could help a lot on your keelboat. SAL

Sorry, little girl. Now you better get inside. Looks like its gettin ready to thunder and lightnin. MIKE

lightning strikes (SAL doesn't move as thunder is heard and on stage)

Did you hear me? Its startin to storm. Hurry up inside. MIKE

and lightning (SAL doesn't move as more thunder is heard strikes on stage nearer her)

Sal, its dangerous. Get inside. MIKE

FINE!

SAL

(SAL moves toward her house when a lightning strikes towards her {actually ANNIE carrying a flat two-dimensional cardboard lightning). SAL steps aside non-chalantly and avoids the lightning. The lightning gets mad and starts to chase out of her. SAL dodges it like a bull fight as MIKE stares on frightened and amazed. Finally, SAL punches the lightning bolt, shattering it into a lot of small bolts {ANNIE throws the small bolts into the air})

SAL

Here, Pa, you can use these lightning bolt bits as charges for your guns.

MIKE

Thank ye.

(SAL walks toward the house and MIKE “poles” away)

SAL (mumbling)

Just a little girl. Too helpless. I could be the best keelboats woman ever.....

(lights go down and come right up on SAL, a red headed tomboy, young girl of 14 is waving as MIKE, “poles” home in his two dimensional boat)

SAL

Oh, Pa, its good to have you home! You’ve been gone a long time!

MIKE

Just 2 years. You know, its hard work polin’, paddlin’, and pullin my keelboat “Lil’ Sal” up the Mississippi.

SAL

That’s why you’re the best keelboatsman on the Mississippi.

MIKE

Yep, I’m a muddy water bawler!

SAL (with less enthusiam this time and faster)

A salt river caterwauller!

MIKE

I’m a reg’lar hollerer

SAL

from the ol' Mississipp'.

MIKE

I love my keelboat!

SAL

You kinda love your daughter!

MIKE

And I'm strong as iron an' chockful o' fight.

SAL

You're half wild panther

MIKE

an half sneaky weasel

SAL

and the rest of you is snappin turtle bite.

MIKE

I can outrun,

SAL

Outjump,

MIKE

Outshoot,

SAL

Outbrag,

MIKE

Outspit,

BOTH

Out fight, rough 'n' tumble, no holts barred, any man on both sides the river from Pittsburg to New Orleans.

MIKE

Cock-a-doodle-do!

SAL

Cock-a doodle-do!

BOTH

Cock-a-doodle-do!

MIKE

Well, its time for another trip down the Mississipp'.

SAL

I want to be a keelboat woman more than anythin. Take me go with you, Pa!

MIKE

That's cute, darlin'. But you're just a little girl of 13.

SAL

I'm 14, Paw.

MIKE

Oh... Anyway, I admit. You're not helpless, but you'd still be too scared to be a keelboatsman. Its dangerous out there.

SAL

But, Pa, I am brave. I could help a lot on your keelboat.

MIKE

Sorry, little girl. A keelboatsman has to be so brave, he can sing and dance in the middle of trouble. Now why don't you go up the river a ways to the store and get yourself some candy like a good little girl.

(SAL doesn't move as a couple of alligators {Two actors moving two 2 dimensional cutouts of alligators} come up the river)

MIKE

Did you hear me? Just go up the river a ways and forget about bein' a keelboatsman.

(The alligators swim closer to her)

SAL

FINE!

MIKE

Sal, look out for those gators!

(The ALLIGATORS open their mouths and SAL kicks them shut. SAL wrestles the gators back into the water and jumps on their backs as MIKE stares on frightened and amazed. Finally, SAL rides the gators upstream. SHE sings "Yankee Doodle" and tap dances on them {or really the floor behind them}. At end of verse she mumbles and exits)

SAL (mumbling)

Just a little girl. Too scared my foot. I could be the best keelboats woman ever.....

(lights go down and come right up on SAL, a red headed tomboy, young girl of 17 is waitin' as MIKE, "poles" home in his two dimensional boat)

SAL



Pa, its about time you came back! You've been gone a long time! We haven't seen you in three years!

MIKE

Its hard work polin', paddlin', and pullin my keelboat "Lil' Sal" up the Mississippi.

SAL

That's why you say you're the best keelboatsman on the Mississippi.

MIKE

Yep, I'm a muddy water bawler!

SAL (rollin her eyes)

A salt river caterwauller

MIKE

I'm a reg'lar hollerer

SAL

always on the ol' Mississip'.

MIKE

I love my keelboat

SAL

You could care less about your daughter

MIKE

And I'm strong as iron an' chockful o' fight.

SAL

Yea, yea, yea. Anyway, I'm gonna be a keelboat woman. Take me with you, Pa!

MIKE

That's cute, darlin'. But you're just a little girl of 15.

SAL

If you ever stayed around here, you'd know I'm 17, Paw. And I'm not a little girl, I'm not helpless, and I'm not scared.

MIKE

I'll admit you're right, but you're not strong enough to be a keelboatsman.

SAL

But, Pa, I am strong.

MIKE

I'm sure you are strong, for a girl.

SAL

I'd be a lot of help on your boat.

MIKE

Sorry, little girl. Now I've got to make another trip-o down the ol' Mississipp. Why don't you go inside and knit some mittens or bake some johnny-cakes with your ma?

(SAL doesn't move as a bear and his two cubs come out of the woods {possibly ANNIE in a bad bear costume and actors carryin cut outs of the cubs})

MIKE

Did you hear me? There has never been a woman keelboat driver and there won't be one. Just go inside and forget about bein' a keelboatsman.

(The bear moves closer to her)

SAL

FINE!

MIKE

Sal, look out for those bears!

(The old bear tries to grab her while the two little ones snap at her heels. SAL yells)

SAL

Hi-i-i-i-i-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-who-whooh!

(The yell stops the bears.)

SAL

Good. Don't mess with me!

(Bears attack her again.)

SAL

I warn'd ya.

(SAL then kicks the two big ones sending them sprawling. The old bear tries to bear hug her. She punches the old bear, but the old bear won't let go. SAL then picks up a rock and hits the bear.)

SAL

Sorry it come to that, ol bar. But I got my honor to think about-well's my own skin.

(the cubs start whimpering)

SAL

SIT!

(The cubs sit and are ready to obey)

SAL

Now take your daddy back to yer cave, cubs and tell yer friends not to mess with me agin

(BEARS all exit)

MIKE

Sal, I was wrong. If you can beat up a lightnin bolt without a singe, ride gators like they were horses, and beat up a papa bear single handedly, then you can do more than I can. Here, this boat is yours. You can be a keelboatswoman.

SAL

You comin' along with me?

MIKE

No, I always said, I wouldn't give up my roost on the river until someone better came alor  
And someone did. I'm givin up keelboatin and headin' west to become a fur hunter.

(MIKE exits and SAL "poles" down the river)

PROFESSOR POPPLE

And just like that Sal Fink became a keelboat woman. And the best keelboater the  
Mississipp had ever seen.