

Behind The Scenes

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE WRITERS? We may be seeing a lot of Shakespeare here.

An investigation into unpaid licensing fees and royalties has left the Chico theater community reeling and, in some cases, in jeopardy.

Hollywood licensing company Samuel French is primarily concerned with possible transgressions by Theatre Out of a Suitcase and the more-or-less defunct Other Theatre. A dozen 1987-89 Suitcase plays are in question.

"The jury's still out," said Samuel French representative Judy Heinz, "but we could not locate any licensing or royalty payments in this office for 12 plays. Quite frankly, we've never had a group do 12 shows without paying rights, if that's the case."

Suitcase co-owner Bob Stout, a contributing editor of the News & Review currently on leave, said he wasn't directly involved during the 1987-88 seasons, during which all but one of the shows were produced. Suitcase co-founder Larry Tripp handled royalties before leaving for Hollywood last year, Stout said.

Until the matter is settled, Heinz said, Samuel French would not license plays to the Suitcase troupe, forcing the indefinite postponement of *Orphans*, scheduled to open at LaSalles last Monday evening.

"We're disappointed that we can't do the show," Stout said. "One of the ironies is that having reorganized the theater and made a really conscious effort to pay royalties and so forth, we got sideswiped."

While Heinz said a \$3200 figure named in a Monday Enterprise-Record story was inaccurate—no amount has been decided upon—that may not be good news for the troupe. "If we cannot find anything in this office about 12 plays," she said, "the \$3200 figure is way low." Samuel French has requested records for the two seasons, but Suitcase has not kept records for years.

French's current figure for Other Theatre is \$2400 owed, and that could go high-

er if the troupe doesn't claim responsibility for violations for several recent shows, Heinz said.

Tim Burruss, founder of the Plank and a Passion troupe, is unhappy with the licensing company's policies. "The impression I've gotten from Samuel French is that they're trying underhanded techniques to catch people," he said.

"I think the whole thing has caused them to look too unfavorably upon Chico theater," Burruss continued. "We now have to send cast lists and a list of everything the director's done. If there's anyone undesirable on the list, they won't let you do the show."

"Most of the groups in Chico pay their royalties," Heinz said. "This doesn't happen that often; we're always a little shocked and dismayed when it does. Most companies see the need to compensate authors, and they do so."

Heinz has concerns about Chico community theater in general. "It seems strange to me that I get calls from other theaters in town telling me how shocked they are that people don't pay royalties, and the next thing I find out is that they've cast one of these people in their shows," she said. "I personally have questions about where people's loyalties are."

"We are artists. We would not screw other artists," joked Suitcase co-owner Dave Lindstrom. "On the other hand, we are not businessmen."

ALL RIGHT, NOBODY MOVE: The Chico Arts Center, which had sold its Glenn Street facility and was in the market for a new place, apparently is staying put. Jeri Bridges, director of the non-profit teaching and gallery center, told the News & Review that escrow had fallen through on the sale of its building. Meanwhile, the CAC had not located a new and better place. So it's staying put and trying to get back those members who defected during the period of instability. Look for a new series of shows beginning in the fall.