

Barn to open hit musical 'Big River'

The Enquirer

AUGUSTA - The Mighty Mississippi will flow through the area starting Tuesday when the Barn Theatre stages its production of *Big River*.

Country music legend Roger Miller's knee-slapping, foot-stomping, down-home musical is suited for the whole family.

Winner of seven Tony Awards, including Best Score, Best Book and Best Musical, *Big River* brings to the stage the characters of Mark Twain's classic tale *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

The highly acclaimed musical opened on Broadway in 1985 and was deemed one of the best to come down the Broadway pike in years.

Big River chronicles life on the mighty Mississippi River in the 1840s when young Huck Finn decides to lead a life unfettered by the conventional civilities of the day and flees on a raft down the river.

His companion is a runaway slave named Jim, who is trying to flee to freedom and the chance to bring his family out of bondage.

On their journey, they meet a curious assortment of rough river men, con artists and just plain, good ol' folk who inhabit the Mississippi River from fictitious St. Petersburg, Mo., to Hillsborough, Ark.

Along the way, Huck wrestles with his learned prejudices and perceptions of people who are different from him and his gut feelings about his new friendship with Jim, comparing what he has been taught about what is "right" through what he knows in his heart is true.

Director Brendan Ragozky has assembled an experienced cast of performers to bring to life the famous characters.

Guest stars Stephen Lynch and Jeff Coopwood, both familiar to Barn patrons, take the leading roles of Huck and Jim.

Lynch, a graduate of Western Michigan University, was last seen at the Barn two years ago when he

ON STAGE

- **WHAT:** *Big River*.
 - **WHEN:** Tuesday through Aug. 2.
 - **WHERE:** Barn Theatre on M-96, west of Augusta.
 - **TIMES:** 8:30 p.m. Tuesday through Friday, 6 and 9 p.m. Saturday and 5 p.m. Sunday.
 - **TICKETS:** \$22.50 Tuesday through Thursday; \$25 Friday through Sunday.
- For reservations or more information, call 731-4121 from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily.

played Alan Strang in *Equus*, the man in the park in *Sylvia* and the son in *La Cage Aux Folles*.

Since then, he has been touring his one man show, *I'll Catch You in Hell* at the Catch a Rising Star in New York and opening for such acts as Steven Wright, Bobcat Goldthwait and Yo La Tengo.

He made his television debut last winter appearing on Comedy Central's *Premium Blend*.

Coopwood played Hud in the Barn's 1989 production of *Hair*.

A resident of Los Angeles, he has made guest star appearances on several television shows, including *Seinfeld*; *Brooklyn South*; *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman*; *Beverly Hills 90210*; *The Bold and the Beautiful*; and *The Client*.

One of the busiest voice-over artists in Hollywood, his voice has been heard in more than 30 films, including the voice of Borg in *Star Trek, First Contact* and in *The Rock, The fugitive, The Preacher's Wife, A Time to Kill* and the upcoming *Why Do Fools Fall in Love?* with Haile Berry.

He has performed at the Miami Opera, the Muny Opera in St. Louis and was in the national Broadway tour of *Timbuktu*. He recently completed an all-star run of *Finian's Rainbow* with the Reprise! Concert series in Los Angeles. He also is an Emmy-nominated broadcaster for cable station WGN.



FOR THE ENQUIRER

Jeff Coopwood, left, plays Jim and Stephen Lynch plays Huck in the Barn Theatre production of *Big River*. The hit musical opens Tuesday and runs through Aug. 2 on the Augusta stage.

The cast also features Joe Aiello and Robin Haynes as the devious duo of The King and the Duke, Stacey Plaskett as Miss Watson, Eric Parker as Pap Finn, Tom Roland as Judge Thatcher, John C. Brown as Tom Sawyer and Howard McBride as the irrepressible author, Mark Twain.

Big River is not only a big cast show, but it presents technical challenges as well.

One of the biggest tasks confronting set designer Tom Burch, technical director Fred Gillette and

lighting designer Ann Marie Miller is creating the effect of the Mississippi River flowing from the background out onto the stage.

The stage area changes several times to give the illusion of a raft floating down the river to solid, dry land to accommodate the journey of the raft from place to place as Huck and Jim make their getaway.

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