

Tempe director, Mesa actor go 'Around the World in 80 Days'

David M. Brown, Special for The Republic | azcentral.com 9:32 a.m. MST April 7, 2014



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Mesa actor Jon Gentry is going global, playing Passeportout, manservant to intrepid adventurer Phileas Fogg, in the Arizona Theatre Company production of Jules Verne's classic "Around the World in 80 Days."

Making his ATC mainstage debut, Gentry is among five actors in the production that continues through Sunday, April 13, at the Herberger Theater Center, 222 E. Monroe St. in Phoenix. The actors play 39 characters in the theatrical adaptation of the celebrated 1873 novel about explorer Fogg's attempt to

circumnavigate the world to win a bet while he is relentlessly pursued, from London to India, the Far East and across the American frontier, by Detective Fix.

Review: [Arizona Theatre Company's 'Around the World'](http://www.azcentral.com/story/entertainment/events/2014/04/02/review-arizona-theatre-companys-around-world/7211311/) (<http://www.azcentral.com/story/entertainment/events/2014/04/02/review-arizona-theatre-companys-around-world/7211311/>)

Adapted by Mark Brown, the production is directed by Tempe's David P. Saar, founder of and artistic director for Childsplay, based at the Tempe Center for the Arts. Playing the key roles: Mark Anders is Fogg; Yolanda London is Aouda, a young woman from India; Kyle Sorrell is Sir Francis, an English army officer; and Bob Sorenson, in his 22nd ATC appearance, is Fix.

"Passeportout takes the job as manservant because he says he wants 'the quiet life' after having been, among other things, a circus aerialist and a sergeant in the Paris Fire Brigade," Gentry said. "However, he spends most of the play saving women from being burned to death in a ritual killing in Bombay, climbing under a runaway train to rescue passengers from an attack by the natives in America, being taken to an opium den in Hong Kong and serving tea while riding atop an elephant in India."

Gentry was schooled in the Mesa Public School system, attended Mesa Community College and graduated from Arizona State University with a degree in secondary education. Theatrical from childhood, he was shy, so he started his stage work with the seventh-grade choir.

"You're buried in a group, much safer for the shy," Gentry said. "I took my first drama class my senior year in high school and that was sort of it. I guess I was hooked."

Gentry has been an actor, teacher and director with Childsplay for 31 years and has worked with most of the other professional Valley companies. ATC chose him from among the inaugural 10 actors to participate in the Lunt/Fontanne Actor Fellowship Program at Ten Chimneys with Lynn Redgrave as master teacher. He helped develop ATC's Summer On Stage program and was a director and lead instructor for its first nine years.

"While this version of the script has often been done á la 'It's A Mad, Mad, Mad World,' with just nonsensical crazy things thrown in, this production is more a grand theatrical version, which looks stunning with its costumes and set, has some real theater tricks and is more whimsical with a lot of heart," Gentry said.

Tickets: www.arizonatheatre.org, 602-256-6995. Discounts available for seniors, active military and students.

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