

# North Park Couple Take Plays Around The Country

*Traveling Lantern teams set out in March to Michigan, Northern Washington and Oregon with Hobbit and Bard*

By Charlene Baldrige

Over breakfast at The Mission, North Park actor/director Doren Elias talks of putting the final touches on David Henry Hwang's 1988 Tony Award-winning play, "M. Butterfly." Co-produced by Asian American Repertory and Diversionary Theatre, it will be seen March 20 through May 8 at Diversionary, 4545 Park Blvd.

As complicated as directing "M. Butterfly" may be — the three-act play has 48 scenes — Elias has another huge project, namely an educational theater company the fruits of which are seen nationally.

For nearly a decade, Elias and his wife of five years, K.B. Mercer, (a marvelous Sally Bowles in North Coast Rep's "Cabaret" last season), created, performed and directed biographplays, enlivening historical figures like composers Mozart and Beethoven (each part of the Mainly Mozart Education Program) and artist Leonardo da Vinci. Mercer played as many as 18 characters in each piece, while Elias portrayed the genius throughout.

In January the couple, who initially met as Old Globe playguides, took over The Traveling Lantern ([www.travelinglantern.com](http://www.travelinglantern.com)), a thriving, 18-year-old educational theater. Included in the deal are 17 productions suitable for kindergarten through 12th grade.

"K.B. and I are producing six shows to go on tour right now," Elias says. "We have one somewhere around Erie, Pa., and another in Tucson." These are "The Hobbit" and "Shakespeare: The Bard," which Elias

described as a day in the life of the Bard.

Two additional teams are out in March, one to Michigan, another to Northern Washington and Oregon. Fall Traveling Lantern productions include "The Sword in the Stone," "Greek Mythology" and "The Life of Mozart." Mercer and Elias already have cast another pair to wear the powdered wigs as Mozart and his wife Constanze.

The Traveling Lantern style is informed

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by traditions that arose in the Middle Ages when theater troupes toured the countryside. Each production team consists of a set of players and a vehicle that contains scenery, props and costumes — everything needed to quickly set up in gymnasiums, cafeterias, multi-purpose rooms or courtyards, weather permitting.

Thus far the actors hail from San Diego, Los Angeles and Dell'Arte International School of Physical Theatre in Blue Lake, where Elias will soon hold auditions.

"We love this," says K.B. from the couple's home and office. "It's so perfectly suited to our talents, personalities, dreams and hearts. Had we searched the world over we never would have found a job or a future we could love more." ♦