

Have Capitol fun in

Troupe takes equal-opportunity approach in skewering D.C.

By Paul Hyde

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If Congress were suddenly afflicted by an outbreak of good sense, the singing satirists known as The Capitol Steps might be out of a job.

"We've always said that the greatest enemy to our job is total competence in government," says Mark Eaton, one of the Washington, D.C.-based group's chief writers and performers.

Luckily for The Capitol Steps, congressional bickering and other perennial antics should keep the group flourishing for a long time to come, Eaton adds.

"Lawmakers these days can't even agree on the color of the sky," he says.

The Capitol Steps bring their special brand of political humor to the Flat Rock Playhouse, beginning Wednesday and continuing through Sept. 25.

Five members of the group, along with a pianist, will wax musical and satirical on the many woes of Washington — from the debt ceiling to the big spenders to the obstructionists and the host of presidential hopefuls clamoring for your vote.

Everyone and everything are fair game.

"We try to be equal-opportunity offenders," says

Eaton, on the phone from Washington, D.C. "If you think we're picking on your side too much, just hold on because we'll go after the other guys next."

The group's songs often are based on familiar popular tunes. You might hear a tea party tune ("Fun Fun Fun 'til Obama Takes Our Tea Bags Away") or a ditty aimed at the Democrats ("Return to Spenders.")

Eaton says the group strives to keep the show upbeat and up-to-date.

"It's a very fast-paced look at the lighter side of politics," Eaton says. "During a 90-minute show there might be 30 or so different song parodies and skits. As headlines change, we change the show, continually adding new material."

The things that frustrate many Americans about Washington make ideal fodder for The Capitol Steps.

"A good sex scandal especially makes for good comedy," Eaton says.

At the heart of the show is a healthy skepticism about politics, he says.

"We often say the opposite of 'progress' is 'Congress,'" Eaton says.

Washington's never-ending tempests and controversies have kept The Capitol Steps going for 30 years. The Capitol Steps were conceived in December 1981 when some staffers for Sen. Charles Percy were planning entertainment for a Christmas party.

"We wanted to do a Nativity play, but in all of Congress we couldn't find three wise men and a vir-

YOU CAN GO

What: The Capitol Steps
When: Wednesday-Sept. 25; evening performances are Wednesday through Saturday at 8 p.m.; matinee performances are most Wednesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays at 2 p.m.

Where: Flat Rock Playhouse, 2661 Greenville Highway, Flat Rock, N.C.

Tickets: \$40 with discounts for seniors, students and groups

Information: 828-693-0731, toll free at 866-732-8008 or online at

www.flatrockplayhouse.org

gin," Eaton says.

So the staffers wrote some songs based on the headlines of the day, and The Capitol Steps were born.

"When it started, it was just a sideline for a bunch of office clownsters," Eaton says.

But soon the group became a full-time job for the performers. Currently, the company numbers 25 members, many of whom have worked on Capitol Hill. Eaton worked for two GOP senators — Virginian Paul Tribble and North Carolinian Jesse Helms — before joining The Capitol Steps in 1993.

The group has recorded more than 30 albums, including the latest "Desperate Housemembers" and the special holiday release "Barackin' Around the Christmas Tree."

The Capitol Steps perform regularly in Washington and sometimes feature two smaller ensembles on



the road as well.

Politicians can often be found in the audience of a Capitol Steps performance, Eaton says.

"The only time they'll give us a hard time is if they're not featured in the show," he says.

The Capitol Steps' performances at Flat Rock mark the group's first appearance at the playhouse.

"We have a lot of cast members fighting for that gig," Eaton says. "Everybody knows it'll be fun to be up in the mountains in the fall."

■ Arts Writer Paul Hyde can be reached at 864-298-4004.



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