

Backstage at the Barn

Scene One

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Backstage at the Barn is an electronic newsletter of information, events, and tidbits related to The Barn Theater.

If you know of others who would like to receive this newsletter, invite them to contact the editor at ciderhouse@ocsnet.net. Feel free to forward this newsletter.

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1. Election of Board Members, June 2006

Each year, The Barn Theater elects nine members to fill the seats of the nine Board members whose 2-year terms have expired, half of the 18-member Board. 171 persons were eligible to vote in this year's election, and approximately 80 ballots were returned.

We congratulate the successful candidates, and urge those who were not elected, to continue their important contributions of time and talent. The newly-elected Board members are:

Ralph Bourne, Bob Merzoian, Joan Givan, Gordy Plaisted, Peter Grant, Wendy Plaisted, Debra Hanks, Michelin White, and Terry Manning

They join the nine who were elected last year--- Vonnie Collier, Wesley Cox, Ian Hammer, Janet Richey, Steve Ross, Willa Stockle, Robert Vanderhorst, Elfrieda Whatley, and Leslie Woudstra.

The new Board took over the reins at the July 10 meeting, where they elected new officers:

President: Joan Givan
VicePresident: Steve Ross
Treasurer: Vonnie Collier
Rec.Secretary: Leslie Woudstra
Cor. Secretary: Wesley Cox

2. Auditions for *Steel Magnolias* Scheduled for July 16 and 17, Y'all

Director Peter Grant invites any and all interested women to audition for roles in *Steel Magnolias*. The cast list calls for six eccentric and funny women who frequent Truvy's Beauty Parlor in a small parish in modern-day Louisiana. Auditions will be held at the theater on Sunday afternoon, July 16, and evening, July 17. Actors will be asked to demonstrate their southern accents. Contact Peter Grant at 793-1359 for further details.

3. How Can You Help The Barn Theater?

In each issue of *Backstage*, we'll attempt to give you at least one idea---besides the obvious one---to help The Barn Theater. Here's an idea you might not have thought of:

A youth member of The Children's Theater of Dover and Kent County, Delaware, has adopted the Theater's costume room for his Eagle Scout project. He along with other members of the theater and the Scout troop, cleared out the entire costume room, painted the walls, and organized the costumes by categories. Shelving and a sewing/worktable are also in the works.

If you know of any Eagle Scout candidates looking for a project, tell them about The Barn. Recent attempts to bring order to our chaotic costume loft have been improvements, but there is much more to be done. Other possibilities include a re-organization of our outdoor storage area, lovingly dubbed the "Bull-Pen."

By the way, the "obvious idea" is to buy season tickets and invite your friends and family to join you in a night at the theater.

4. Weird Happenings at The Barn: Arachnophobia

Even casual patrons are aware of the spider population in our beloved Barn, as evidenced by the webs that festoon its rafters, beams, and other support structures, even directly above the stage. As you might guess, sooner or later, the weavers of these gauzy draperies were bound to make their appearance as impromptu walk-ons, dangling at the end of shining filaments. Well, the inevitable did occur during a performance of (would you believe) *Dracula the Musical*. The audience had already spotted a particularly juicy 8-legged critter, hovering in the spotlight. David Larson, in the role of Dracula, managed to ignore the little scene-stealer, but the inimitable George Pearce, in the role of Renfield, Dracula's creepy servant, not about to be upstaged

Weird Happenings (cont'd)

by a spider, couldn't resist an opportunity to gross-out the audience. He reached up and snatched the little wiggly thing and popped it into his mouth, apparently eating it. And I haven't found anyone who will deny that he did. "I didn't hesitate at all," says George. "It fit my character perfectly." In case you're wondering, George says it tasted like chicken.

5. Meet the Actor: Michelin White

The youngest member of the Barn Theater Board of Directors also happens to be one of the Barn's most talented performers. Michelin White's stage career began at age four in *Annie*, under the direction of Beverly Rose. In those days, the theater's lobby has not been added, and Michelin's fondest memory of *Annie* was Wendy Plaisted twirling her around on the lawn where the lobby now stands. You've got to remember---she was only four.

Basically shy as a child, she found acting to be an outlet where she could excel, and excel she has. Over the years, she has appeared in at least 20 productions at The Barn and Porterville College, including *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Dracula the Musical* (yep, she saw George eat the spider), *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat*. Her favorite roles were as Cherie in *Bus Stop*, and the title role in *The Insanity of Mary Girard*, which she considers her most challenging experience.

Michelin lists Beverly Rose, Elfrieda Whatley, and Shirley Hughes as the mentors who influenced her career. She'd like to do the same for the young aspiring actors of Porterville. She'd like to see more opportunities in drama for local teens in the summer and after school.

One possibility she's considering is organizing a scholastic one-act play festival at The Barn. She debuted as a director with *Babes in Toyland* last season, a critical success and an audience favorite which saw the debut performances of several promising young actors. This year, she will direct *Dear Edwina Jr.*, opening October 27th.

She met her husband, Ian Hammer, a fellow Barn Theater Board member and stage colleague, at The Barn, although not under theatrical circumstances. The two have since teamed up in several productions including a stage appearance in one of Ralph Bourne's *Twilighted Zones*.

Michelin's first impression of the Board of Directors is that the Board is "moving in the right direction. I have great respect for my colleagues on the Board. They work hard for the success of The Barn, and are unafraid to make changes when they are needed."

Her lovely singing voice and superb acting talent have now joined with her leadership role in The Barn family to make Michelin White one of The Barn's greatest assets.

6. Using Community Leaders on Our Stage

Wouldn't it be fun to coax some of the higher profile folks in town to take turns filling a bit part in a Barn production?

Would Mike Ennis and Bob Perez enjoy a little exposure in *Steel Magnolias*? Well, okay, that won't work unless Bob and Mike wouldn't mind wearing a wig; there are no male roles. But there other opportunities throughout the season. In a role with a few lines, it wouldn't take much away from their busy schedules, and they might welcome a light moment or two.

How about a local school principal, a prominent businessperson? How about Mayor Cam Hamilton or Councilman Richard Stadther? Shirley Houser or Virginia Gurrola? We could find eight popular figures to do one-night cameos for each of a play's eight scheduled performances.

It worked for the City Circle Acting Company of Coralville, Iowa. They used major community leaders in their fall production of *Gypsy* in the role of Mr. Goldstone. Each brought a piece of his own personality to the role, delighting audiences and the Acting Company. Receptions, sponsored by local businesses, followed the performances.

7. You think we had problems: Community Theater after Katrina

The burglary that postponed the opening of *Waiting in the Wings* was a major disruption at The Barn, with damage to repair and technical gear to restore. But compared to the folks of the Lake Charles Little Theater in Louisiana, our problem was small.

Hurricanes caused extensive damage to the theater's roof, allowing rain in, ruining the walls in the auditorium and an incredible amount of props, and the makeup room completely caved in. They were not allowed to return to their community for 17 days. The rest of the fall season was cancelled.

An insurance claim was filed, but as of mid-January, they had not received an insurance check. Still, they worked tirelessly, getting back on schedule with the opening of *Little Women* on January 28.

Community Theater after Katrina (cont'd)

In addition to tackling soaked sheetrock, the group refused to be completely dark in the fall. With the help of a local university, LCLT produced *It's a Wonderful Life*, using radio show staging in university facilities as a fundraiser.

8. Springville Planning Outdoor Theater for Summer 2007

A small group of Springville residents have begun preliminary planning for a series of short plays to be staged at a yet-to-be-determined outdoor venue. The productions are envisioned as modest in scale, with minimal props and sets, free to the public. Stay tuned for further details.

9. An Editorial: Serving Two Masters

The Barn Theater has always served two masters. The first is the playgoer, and we bow in great reverence to him or her. The playgoer gives us two magical ingredients for the recipe of live community theater: an audience and a way to pay the bills. How dreadful it would be to play to an empty house. No applause, no laughter, no friends and family rooting for you and praying you have finally memorized all your lines. A good audience often makes a good play. And how equally dreadful to be unable to keep the lights burning, the water flowing, the toilets flushing, the potential accidents insured, the scripts purchased, the royalties paid. Alas, community theater comes at a price, a price the playgoer helps pay.

So, of course we want to keep the playgoer happy and filling the auditorium with laughter and applause. We strive to create professional productions using local amateurs, no small task. We make the best sets, set décor, costumes, and technical effects that two or three hundred dollars can buy and volunteers can manufacture. Are we always successful? We make no such claim. After all, we are our own worst critics. Do playgoers leave the theater perennially pleased? To hazard a guess, probably not.

Ah, but there are those wonderful occasions when all the puzzle pieces fit. The right people showed up for the auditions and faithfully attended rehearsals. No one got sick or moved or just bailed out. The set design and construction were brilliant considering the fifty bucks they had to work with. A local furniture store loaned us just the right couch. The actors nailed their lines. The blocking was precise but natural. No one fell out of character. The lighting cues were like clockwork. The child actors were charmingly cute, even to people who weren't their parents. The weather wasn't oppressively hot. The latest action-adventure blockbuster at the Galaxy didn't open until next month. And the play's director had spent a year completely obsessed with the planning of the production. How often do you suppose all of this happens? To hazard another guess, probably not every time.

The playgoer hopes for a hit every time, and if the misses outnumber the hits in any one season, there's a tendency to generalize about the whole season. My wife and I have some experience as playgoers, having had season tickets at the Ahmanson Theater at the L.A. Music Center for 24 years. When

you drive three hours one way, and the play wasn't exactly your cup of tea, the drive home can be long. Yet, every now and then, we strike it rich with a play that moved us profoundly, or a musical that has us humming the whole three hours home and beyond. To truly support live theater, you take the good with the bad. At The Barn you may be disappointed or you may be greatly entertained. The cast and crew of every production works to attain the latter. The knowledgeable playgoer applauds the effort if not the achievement.

There is yet a second master that we serve in live community theater. I was reminded of this during my interview with Michelin White. She counts as one of her favorite roles that of Mary Girard, who might have been insane...or was she? The production was directed by Dick Eckhoff, and he chose this play, I assume, because he liked the challenging and edgy theme. He certainly didn't choose the play because he thought it would draw sell-out crowds. In fact, *Mary Girard* was staged in the lobby with the expectation that the crowds would be small. The night my wife and I attended, we were joined by ten other patrons. And yet, we were treated to a tour de force performance by a talented young actress and her equally young supporting cast. Live community theater, even with sparse crowds, provides the essential experience for its cast, crew and management team to grow in their skills and in their pride of accomplishment. It doesn't pay the bills, but it cannot be denied as a necessary mission of The Barn Theater, even though *The Insanity of Mary Girard* might not have been your cup of tea

